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NEDL TRANSFER



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AN
ALABAMA
WOMAN

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AN ALABAMA WOMAN

BY
ANNABEL BARKER WHITE

F. TENNYSON NEELY COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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GREAT BRITAIN
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TO
MY BEST FRIEND
WHOSE LOYALTY, FAITHFULNESS,
AND DEVOTION
HAVE BEEN UNPARALLELED.

AN ALABAMA WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE war was over. To Mrs. Willard it seemed like a hideous dream. Her husband, a brave Confederate officer, slept in a far-away Virginia grave. Her eldest son of eighteen lay in an unknown trench with hundreds of others.

There were left to her Cora, her only daughter, twelve, and Tresham, a boy of ten.

Her three hundred slaves were freed; her broad acres were untilled; she had left only poverty, loneliness and widowhood.

Mrs. Willard took counsel with her manager, Mr. Mason, who advised her to hire her freed slaves and plant a prodigious crop of cotton. This staple, he argued, was rising in price every day, and in a few years she would be almost as wealthy as before.

Mrs. Willard herself believed it.

"I have never depended on myself, Mr. Mason, and you have faithfully served my family many years. I have perfect confidence in your judgment, and I'm sure all will come out well. Cora and Tresham must be educated, and the war has left me cruelly embarrassed. If you see any way by which we can gain a small competency, I leave the management of all my affairs in your hands."

So Mr. Mason followed the policy of his shortsighted compeers.

Many of Mrs. Willard's old slaves clung to their mistress as a child clings to its mother. The day came when she had to tell them, with a breaking heart, that the huge smoke-houses were empty, and they must begin to depend on themselves. She had neither corn, meat, nor money to give them.

"Oh, the horrors of this war!" she moaned, turning away to hide her tears, as these faithful creatures groaned and sobbed. They had been born into the belief that they "belonged" to this noble mistress and her children, and Fate was cruel to drive them away from her, in her poverty and need.

"Yes, yes, it must be so! You must make new homes for yourselves—you have no master or mistress now—you are free!"

"Mis'tess, I'se not gwine to quit yer 'slong as I kin drap a grain o' cawn, or hoe a 'tater," vowed old Clarissa, the cook. Ruth, her daughter, and Cora's nurse, Wilson, her son, who had been given to Tresham in his babyhood, both said the same. These three servants were all that remained, except the hired tenants that lived in the once populous "quarters."

Everything was neglected but the cultivation of cotton. Mr. Mason hoped that in a few years he would realize enough from its sale to carry on affairs about the plantation as he had done "'fore de wah." The hordes of lazy and thievish freedmen that infested the unhappy South for years after the war made it impossible for the planters to raise cattle and hogs for their own use; they were driven into the swamps at night and killed and eaten by these marauders. Cows with their calves were driven from their pastures in the broad light of day, and boldly slaughtered by these successful thieves. Growing corn—with the ears in "roasting" state, or hard enough to grind into meal—was stolen by moonlight by the exulting darkey as he rode through the fields on an ox and filled his bags and baskets. This was done by the sly rogue to make it appear that the owner's own cattle were destroying the corn. Ripe cotton was picked by moonlight and stolen by day; thus many a bale of cotton was lost to the poor

planter in its unguined state. Fruit trees were broken down by night marauders, and fine orchards destroyed.

"Carpet-baggers" came into office by purchasing the freedman's vote with cheap whiskey and false promises. Ignorance, crime, robbery and immorality were added to the misfortunes caused by the unholy war, and the poor South groaned under its burdens, which indeed seemed more than it could bear.

Mrs. Willard fared as many others did. Her cotton brought fabulous prices, but the money went for corn and bacon raised in the West. The freedman tenant was much more expensive than the slave. He would cultivate no "patches" of his own, such as he took pride in when a slave, but depended on his wages and his "rations"—a peck of meal and four pounds of bacon issued weekly—to support him. The poverty of her former slaves distressed Mrs. Willard more than her own.

At the end of three years Mr. Mason went to her with discouraged mien. "Mrs. Willard, I have made a terrible mistake, and it does not comfort me in the least to know that others have blundered. I am deeply mortified that I have managed the plantation so unwisely. You are really worse off than before—even three years ago. It does not pay to keep our smoke-houses and corn-cribs in the West. If the Government can't or won't help us, I mean to kill as many vagabond niggahs as possible. God knows it is hard enough for us to suffer from the curse of free labor and its attendant evils, without having aliens come in and, in their rapacity to gain office, make it impossible for honest folks to gain a living by attending to their own business. If you approve, I'll rent out the land for part of the crop."

"Do as *you* think best," Mrs. Willard gently replied. "Yes, it seems that God has forsaken our unhappy country, but we are never without hope that these dark days will end soon. I shall not send Cora and Tresham to school, but teach them myself. As you go, please stop and see what you think about Clarissa. She has a dreadful cough, and has not been able to get up for the last two days. I have cared for her, as you know we cannot afford

a doctor. I'm so afraid that she does not get what she needs—I know it!—I know it!" grieved the gentle-hearted woman.

Mr. Mason saw Clarissa, and decided that the best doctor in the world could do her no good. She was in the last stages of consumption, and died shortly after.

Ruth, her daughter, was ready to take her place, but Mrs. Willard said:

"Ruth, I am not able to pay you wages or give you food and clothes. Mrs. Lester wants a cook, and she will be willing and able to pay you for your services. I will recommend you. Cora is now fifteen and quite strong. We shall manage very well, as we both know how to spin and weave, having learned that during the war. We can soon learn anything else that is necessary."

Ruth sat on the steps and sobbed, as only a negro can.

"O, Lordy, mist'ess, wha' you an' po' Miss Cora gwine do without niggahs? 'Twud break mahstua's heart ef he could see yor han's, so brown an' ruf, fur he uster be so proud o' dem case dey so sof' and white! Po li'l Tresham, too, plowin' lak he a niggah! I donno wha' dat onery Wilson wan' run away f'um dey bes' mist'ess any niggah eber had!"

Mrs. Willard was painfully affected by her servant's grief, but she answered:

"Ruth, you know very well that I had to tell poor Wilson to get a new home. I was not able to give him food or clothes, and I could not afford to keep a groom for Tresham. Hard hands generally go with gentle hearts, and Tresham is much happier knowing that he is helping me than if he were riding about on his pony."

Although it broke Ruth's heart to leave her "deah Miss Julia an' po' li'l Miss Cora," poverty's decrees were imperative.

Life had indeed become a hard struggle to the three inmates left in the great echoing mansion, which now seemed haunted with memories of earlier days, when it was filled with gay company and well-trained servants flitted up and down the stairways, where all was dreary sadness and mouldering decay.

Mr. Mason was seized with inflammatory rheumatism about this time, and Mrs. Willard lost her last prop.

When the Furies once get the mortals in their meshes, they are loth to let them go. Mrs. Willard's bitterest grief was her inability to educate her two children as she would like. The knowledge she imparted to them was not meagre, for she was very accomplished and had traveled much. She needed not to fear that her children would grow up like untutored savages, as she averred.

Cora was entering her sixteenth year, and gave promise of much beauty. She was slenderly built, with red gold hair and wine-brown eyes. Tresham was a sturdy lad of thirteen, and his dark blue eyes betokened a brave and unbroken spirit. Although he followed the plow all day long, it did not cow the chivalry he had inherited from a long line of gentlemen.

Generous and manly, with a subtle sympathy for others, what wonder that his mother dreamed dreams of his future which were impossible to be realized.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUESTION ASKED AND ANSWERED.

THREE more years were lived.

The plantation was subdivided into small farms and leased to white tenants.

This was Mr. Mason's plan, and it seemed the right one had been found at last. No one had money—credit ruled the day, which meant ruin to the agricultural prosperity of the South. It took a long time to learn this, for Southerners are loth to give up old ways.

After a few years life took on a brighter hue for these brave toilers—these unselfish, uncomplaining people, who have come out into the broad light of prosperity, and the new South is braver than the old.

Cora Willard at eighteen was one of the loveliest women in the South. To her beauty were added grace, refinement, education and well-trained hands. She had a suitor, whom her mother did not favor. He was the sole heir of an old Alabama family.

Guy Allison was a well developed, muscular man. He had one desire—Cora Willard.

"Yes, we have always known Guy, and I can't point out a single grave fault of his that would make me hesitate to give you into his keeping, and I suppose it is only my foolish mother-love after all that makes me fear to have you leave our poor home for the sumptuous one that Guy will give you, but I——"

"Mother, dear," Cora interrupted, "I have never known you to be unreasonable before. Yes, we have known Guy all our lives, and we have never heard aught against him as man, neighbor and friend. If my heart were not his, I should not persist in a course that clearly gives you pain.

I have waited a year at your suggestion, and I see no change of feeling in Guy and none in myself. Nevertheless, I shall obey your wishes. I could not refuse such a noble and self-sacrificing mother anything," she said, kneeling at her mother's feet.

"Marry him, my darling, and God's blessing be upon your union. You are going to make a new life, but for me there remains very little future, only memories of the past and duties of the present."

The door bell rang.

Cora opened the door, and was embraced by Guy.

"Sweetheart, get your hat and let us drive."

"Guy, dear, mother is not well. Would you mind taking her a little while first?"

"With pleasure. We can all sit in the buggy comfortably."

"I want you to drive her alone!"

"Well, I'll take her first, you later."

"I'll prepare tea while you are away."

"All right, little housewife. Now, tell me, before you go in, when are you to keep house for me?"

"Not now—don't ask me now. Wait till after you have seen mother."

Mrs. Willard welcomed Guy cordially.

"I hear you have a headache. Will you drive with me a while?"

"Cora would enjoy it better."

"Cora is going later."

"O-oh—I see!"

"I shall take you first to the Elms. It is only five miles, and Satan will make it in a few minutes. The house is nearly finished, and I wish you to see it."

All this Guy said as he helped Mrs. Willard in the light vehicle, then gathering up the reins, Satan was allowed to dash off as if spurred by his namesake.

Mrs. Willard grasped the side of the buggy in fear.

"Dear Guy, don't go so fast!" she pleaded.

Guy laughed good-humoredly, and slowed up.

"By the way, don't you think you and I could persuade Cora to name an early date for our marriage? We could

take a run across the big pond and leave the two mothers to see to the furnishing of the house."

"Cora is not unstable, and if she has seemed to hesitate about accepting your proposal, you must blame me—not her. I could not bear the thought of letting her go out of my keeping so soon, but I have just said to her, she may marry you when she will. She has been a true, tender and faithful daughter. I do not doubt that she will prove the same as a wife."

"Nor have I any doubts, and God knows I mean to try to be a good husband to my tender little blossom."

Mrs. Willard turned square around, looked searchingly into his bonnie blue eyes, and laying her thin hand in his plump one, she solemnly said,

"May God help you to keep that resolution, Guy Allison!"

The Elms, a fine house that Guy had been building more than a year, now came in sight.

"Don't you think I was right to plant my trees before building?"

Mrs. Willard smiled approval, and as they went over the house she was deeply touched by his oft-repeated assertion:

"I did this, because I thought Cora would like it," or "Do you think this will please Cora?"

Of course they were late back to tea. Cora did not scold them, and only punished Guy by consenting to a very short drive. It was quite dark when they returned, and Mrs. Willard had given Tresham his tea, and he was now leaning back in a large chair on the piazza with his eyes wearily closed. He was very tired, but as Guy and Cora mounted the piazza steps, he rose and met them.

"Tired, Tresh?" inquired Guy, buoyantly.

"A little," laughed Tresham.

"Cora, you will find this chair very comfortable."

"No, no, my weary Chesterfield, resume your seat. I daresay I can find another just as comfortable."

As the evening was quite warm, of course he must fan her, and every man knows that to do this successfully, one must sit very near, indeed.

Mrs. Willard thought she would find it cooler at the opposite end of the piazza, and so moved her chair thence; after gossiping a while, Tresham thought he must go over and remove from his mother's hands the book she was pretending to read, but which had very little attention from the dark eyes gazing beyond it. To console her for depriving her of her book, he said he would talk to her instead. This delicate consideration added to Guy's pleasure in this pleasantest hour of the Southern summer night.

Too warm to go indoors, too dark to read, and too unpleasant to have a light that would attract those stinging myrmidons of the summer night, time was lost count of in the mere luxury of lying still and taking long breaths of the languid, blossom-scented air that softens the voice of women and instils chivalry into the souls of Southern men.

It is the true air of the Lotus-eater.

CHAPTER III.

AND AFTERWARDS.

'AFTER all Guy finished The Elms before Cora found time to get married.

It was late in August before the wedding, and the bridal pair sailed "o'er the seas."

From time to time something was sent from abroad by the wandering ones, and a year passed before they returned.

Cora was surpassingly beautiful, charmingly hospitable, gracious, and so sympathetic, she became the belle of the county during the fall and winter. But in the spring her health began to cause Guy some anxiety.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing to be alarmed at, my dear boy," the family doctor assured him.

Guy whisked her away to a quiet seaside resort as soon as the weather made it feasible, and watched over her all the summer. Her Christmas gift to him was a dimpled baby boy.

"Mother," he said to Mrs. Willard, when she came over to see this most wonderful of babies, "I'm the happiest man on God's earth. There is another Allison to keep the old name alive."

But before the next Christmas came the baby died.

Guy's grief was terrible.

He had never known a care or sorrow. His nature rebelled madly at what he termed "God's injustice."

"How can He be so cruel as to take from us what we value most? Cora, you are a good woman, can you explain this to me?"

"O, dear Guy, I cannot. I believe all things are for the best—that 'He doeth all things well!' " hiding her head on his shoulder.

"I can't believe that! I've never been a religious man—now I believe in no God! You pray? For what? Have you faith in prayers?"

"Dearest, if I had not, I should go mad," said the weeping mother, putting both arms about his neck. "I pray to meet the loved ones gone before, and above all the soul of our darling. Be comforted, and try to remember that he has only gone before, and that we shall certainly meet him again if we have faith in Christ."

"How can I believe in a God who smites us so sorely? Believe what you wish—to me there is no God!"

And thus he brooded over his sorrow till his strong nerves were shaken.

Unhappily, Guy had a tendency to drink, inherited from his mother's family, the members of which had been either "teetotalers," or "jolly dogs" who ended their days in madness.

Hitherto, Guy had escaped, taking his two glasses daily after dining, but no more. Now he took to sitting long after their dinner, morbidly drinking.

The habit steadily grew, and Cora's gentle entreaties only angered him.

"Becoming a habit, hey? I think I have grit enough to stop when I want to!"

When he found that Cora was again to become a mother, the knowledge seemed to bring him to his senses, and he tried to clear his brain and steady his nerves by indulging less frequently.

The child—a boy—was still-born.

The blow was too much for the disappointed father.

He grew furious with Cora and addled his fevered brain with brandy till he began to persuade himself that she was a criminal, having killed both of the children.

"O, Guy, Guy, my husband!" she moaned, as he stood by her sick-bed with clenched fist and hurled this accusation at her.

The frightened servants urged him from the room, but the shock was so great to Cora that her life was despaired of. Instead of nursing her back to health with the tender care and soothing love of three years ago, he avoided her

room, rarely asked about her, and took frequent trips to the city, twenty miles away, remaining absent sometimes a week, but offering no explanation to his suffering wife. She slowly came back to life and health, a heart-broken woman.

How had this change in Guy come about? Was *she* to blame?

These questions harrowed her soul day and night, and the doubt that she was not the patient, loving wife that Guy deserved, made her tender, sympathetic spirit writhe with anguish. Yes, she was to blame, not he!

CHAPTER IV.

CORA'S DECISION.

ONE day, Tresham rode over to see his sister. It was early fall and he was busy with his cotton picking, but hearing that she was alone, he went to The Elma.

He went quietly into the room where Cora sat, vainly trying to interest herself in some sewing. She sprang up with a little gurgle of delight and was closely folded to her young brother's faithful heart.

"Where is Guy?"

"In Morris," she answered, shutting her eyes tightly to prevent the tears from falling.

"How long has he been away?"

"A week."

"When will he return?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered.

"Sister, I have come to take you home! By heaven! Do you think I can stand tamely by and see you treated so cruelly, so brutally by a man who little more than five years ago swore to love and honor you? Do not take a thing he has given you, but come as you are! We are as poor as ever, but ours is a home of peace."

Tresham was now twenty-one. His character was elevated, his mind refined, and his heart sympathetic. He had taught himself that earth held no easy resting-place for him—he was the son of Labor, who permits no half-hearted measures to its successful sons.

He let Cora sob her grief away on his shoulder, without attempting further consolation.

"How gladly would I go back home, but, Tresham, dear, my duty is here. Do you know, I feel sure that poor

Guy will not live long. Have patience and forgive me if I remain with Guy. Did I not promise to take him for worse, as well as better?"

"What happiness can you have if you remain here?"

"None. It is not *my* happiness I seek, but my poor husband's!"

"It rests with you. Remember, dear, if the time ever comes—and I feel sure that it will—when you can revoke your present decision, a mother and a brother are ready to welcome you."

Cora clung to him desperately as she felt him leaving.

"O, Tresham, there are times when I wonder how I could leave home for *this*—this life of horror and despair! It looked fair and promising then, and could I know of the hidden rocks which might wreck my barque of happiness? Go, dear brother, before I yield to my weak desires and forsake my weaker husband!"

"Good-by!" and kissing her hurriedly, he left the house, and rode homeward.

At dark the wagons were driven into the fields, and the baskets, overflowing with their soft, snowy contents, were collected and hauled to the cotton house, where by the aid of a lantern and old-fashioned steelyards, Tresham weighed the day's pickings.

"Jake, your cotton is too trashy. I'll have to knock off weight for the trash and dirt."

"But, Mahse Tresh, dat on'y on top. Dey bottom clean."

Tresham smiled grimly, and the negroes laughed loudly as Jake's basket was emptied and the bottom contents were found to be even dirtier than the top.

"Seems to me, Bob, your cotton is unusually heavy to-night. Any pickers put in the basket beside you?" Tresham asked carelessly, as he proceeded to weigh another negro's basket.

Bob answered quickly:

"No, sah, no one 'tall, but you see I done picked all dinnah time whiles dey odders res'sed."

"O, yes, I see, and quite by accident, *of course*, you put these stones in the middle of the basket. Here, Lem, let

me have your pick sack long enough to weigh these stones in; their weight must be knocked off of Bob's cotton."

Bob looked crestfallen a moment, then brightening up, suddenly exclaimed:

"Mahse Tresh, I swan 'fore Gawd, I nevveh put dey stones in. Lish's li'l devvils playin' in dey fiel' dis evenin', an' I 'spects dey trow 'em in."

"You'se a liah, Bob," Lish's strong voice interposed authoritatively, "my chillun done gone home 'fore your basket done half full."

Tresham calmly extracted the weight of the stones from the sum total of Bob's cotton, then thrust his hand into another suspiciously heavy basket.

"So, 'Liza, it rained in your part of the field to-day, did it?"

"No, sah," answered 'Liza innocently.

"Strange why your cot on is so wet, when the sun has been shining so fearfully hot all day."

"Aun' 'Liza done poured some watah in her basket what I toted from dey spring fur un to drink," piped a shrill, small voice.

"I'm sorry, for the cotton is ruined, and I shall have to knock off more in weight, perhaps, than will be correct, for you know, 'Liza, it will have to be guess-work—loss of weight."

'Liza looked glumly at the pickaninny that had related the "accident" to her cotton, and he, knowing the consequences if he came within reach of her fingers, carefully skirted the crowd, then ran swiftly homewards.

The weighing was at last finished for that day, and, drawing out a scantily filled purse, Tresham paid the laborers.

"Ned, I shall not need your crowd to-morrow, for, perhaps, I can find an honest set, so I will pay you all to-night."

Ned could recite no extenuating circumstances for the misdemeanors of his "gang" that worked under him, but led them out of the field with "curses not loud, but deep."

His policy was, "Teach the chillun to lie and steal f'um

'dey white folks; dey does it to us," and "Crime is no crime *unless it is found out!*"

Tresham returned to his mother after carefully testing the strength of the locked door of the cotton house, feeding his two horses and locking them and his chickens up. This was in "Construction days." There was danger that the horses would be ridden many miles at night to some "meetin'" or "lection" and the fowls might grace some "colored bredder's" late supper-table, the bones and feathers being carefully burned to conceal the theft, or as a sacrifice to their "unknown gods." Who but they know the meaning of these "burnt offerings"?

CHAPTER V.

WHAT DORA'S OPINION WAS.

"COULD you not *persuade* Cora to return home?" asked Mrs. Willard anxiously.

"Nothing I could say influenced her."

"When a woman thinks a duty must be performed, she does not count the cost—to herself. Men are never able to understand woman's motives."

"I wonder if they will read more clearly in the next world," and Tresham smilingly rose from his seat and kissed his mother. "A wilful woman will have her way," he said.

Her own heart was wrung with that mother's anguish which she must endure at the sight of a child's suffering. Although Dora was too proud to tell them anything, there are many ways by which family skeletons are made visible to a world ever eager and agape to peep through the cracks in the closet door.

Tresham sought his ancient easy chair on the piazza, while Mrs. Willard, left alone, dropped her head on her hands, sighing,

"O, my baby! My little girl!"

"Mist'ess, please ma'am, lemme have a li'l salt. 'Pears like we never will git none no more," said a voice at the doorway.

"Very well, Dora." Mrs. Willard rose, took down a large key from where it hung under the mantelpiece, and bidding Dora bring a lighted torch from the kitchen fireplace, she went out into the soft stillness of the summer night, unlocked the large smoke-house door, and gave the woman the required salt.

"I reckon dey'll never be no more hams and sassaages,

nor pickled beef an' po'k lak dey was in ol' Mahse's time," she sighed. "Mist'ess, I 'clare I think freedom wuss on dey niggah dan dey white pussun. When we gits outen meat an' meal we has to go to dey black bay patch. It h'ain't lak it usen be. Dar's li'l Jane sick yit, an' I donno what do fer her."

"Is your baby sick yet?" quickly inquired her former mistress, whose sympathies were aroused by this poor woman's words and needs.

Dora shook her head gloomily.

"I doan' think she live many days."

"Well, as soon as Tresham rests a little, I will ask him to walk with me to the quarter and I will see what I can do for your baby."

"O, thankee, mist'ess, an' ef Joe wa'n't waitin' fer bread, I'd stay an' wash your suppah dishes. It breaks my heart to see you wu'k so hard."

"Go back to your hungry husband and sick baby, my poor Dora," Mrs. Willard said, sadly turning homeward.

"Dora's baby is quite sick, and I have promised to go over to see it to-night," said Mrs. Willard to her son, as she arranged the cups and saucers for their morning cup of coffee.

"Poor devils! After all the curse of freedom falls more heavily on them than on their quondam masters. They are in a more pitiable condition than ours."

"'Curse of freedom' is a new expression, Tresham."

"But a true one, mother, in this case. When those negroes were your property, you fed, clothed and cared for them, and paid a doctor to watch their health; they were too valuable to be abused or ill-cared for. Now the poor wretch must work for scanty wages, starve or steal. No one cares if he falls ill, for he is of no value to any one."

"Very true, my dear, but we see through a glass darkly just now."

Tresham laughed bitterly.

"I am too young, I suppose, to discuss the issue, as it was caused by men who died before I was born, but do you think that God had anything to do with freeing our slaves? It is the jealousy and ambition of a few politicians that

has brought this destitution; our lands laid waste, our property destroyed, and the negro in misery and poverty."

"No, dear, you should think it a broad philanthropy. They felt it would be better for us and for all that the South should free its slaves."

"Perhaps," moodily answered Tresham, for it was a subject on which they never could agree. He waited silently while his mother prepared a little basket.

As they walked out, she continued:

"Even now we are beginning to realize this. Had the South succeeded in its wild ambition of establishing a separate government, it would always have been at war with its neighbor—the North. There would have been constant jealousy and quarreling—the South would have grown proud, arrogant and rich. Tresham, can't you see it would one day have been in the same pitiable condition as Spain? Continual wars with other nations, and especially the North, would have led to its downfall. Can't you see God's wisdom in all this?"

"I see I have a wonderfully wise mother," he said, tenderly.

"And I the best of sons," she added.

Tresham repressed a sigh.

What would he not do to surround this self-sacrificing mother with wealth and the ease she once enjoyed? How it hurt him to see her at her menial tasks day after day, so cheerful, brave and uncomplaining.

Were there not thousands such as she? Has a conquered people ever shown nobler women than those of our South?

CHAPTER VI.

IN DORA'S CABIN.

TRESHAM and Mrs. Willard were not long reaching the cabin of their humble neighbor.

A roaring lightwood fire burned in the wide-throated chimney, and a brawny negro sat in its heat, gloomily smoking a corn-cob pipe. A pallet of soiled quilts near him held the attenuated form of a little child. Dora was bending over it, as feebly it moaned and turned its head uneasily from side to side.

When Jim saw his erstwhile mistress enter with her son, he rose, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and thrusting it out of sight, asked them to sit down. Mrs. Willard knelt by the child and felt its rapidly bounding pulse.

"Jim, you have been giving this child green water-melons and unripe peaches," Tresham said sharply, for his keen eye had detected in a corner the remains of fruit.

"Not much, Mahse Tresh. Dora 'n me been eatin' some nice fruit, an' we jes' give dey baby a li'l bit 'cause it seem so thirsty-lak."

"The baby will be dead before morning," Tresham said, as he too knelt beside the bed, and felt the hot little wrist.

A loud cry came from Dora.

"O, Mahse Tresh, doan', doan' say dat!"

"It is true, Dora, and you and Jim have killed it as you killed your other children—with unwholesome fruit."

"O, Lordy, Mahse Tresh, doan' say dat! I 'clare we done give it jest a li'l bit—jes' a li'l bit—not nuff ter hurt."

"But enough to give a teething child cholera morbus,

my poor Dora," gently interposed Mrs. Willard; "but I do not think it is as hopelessly ill as you say, son."

"I hope not," replied Tresham, rising and going to the door to conceal the moisture in his own eyes. He was very unhappy, for he was unable to help this poor suffering family. His own supper had been cornmeal mush and milk—nothing more—and he knew there was no medicine in the large, empty store-room at home, which had once held everything any one might need.

"We will put the child in a hot bath, and afterwards apply hot mush poultices," counseled Mrs. Willard.

Dora ran to get meal, Jim threw on another stick of lightwood, and swung a pot of water over the fire by aid of the old-fashioned crane.

Mrs. Willard worked faithfully over the suffering child, but it died in her arms.

Other negroes had come in, and Mrs. Willard and Tresham left the hysterical Dora and the stolid Jim in their care.

Jim took out his pipe, crushed some dried "wild tobacco" leaves in it, and smoked silently by the side of the hot fire.

"There will be no work done on the plantation to-morrow, except by me," remarked Tresham, as they walked back to their own gloomy house.

"Why?"

"You a Southern woman, mother, and ask that question! If Jim were my slave, I would send two men to dig the grave and bury that child, but being 'free' every negro for miles around will stop work and come to the 'berryin'.' They scent death as the carrion crow scents its feast—and all will come to assist at the burial of a baby."

"Well, dear, I like to think the poor creatures are sympathetic."

"My innocent little mother, have you yet to learn that the negro will shirk labor under the most trifling pretext, that it is not sympathy but laziness which makes the freed-man so willing to lend a helping hand at burials, weddings, etc.? I remember reading of an author who had traveled in the South in ante-bellum days. He observed

the slow movements and lusterless eyes of the slave with tenderest sympathy. Do you see that they have gained in energy or industry since Freedom took them in her sheltering arms?"

"Hush, dear, you are moody and bitter to-night."

CHAPTER VII.

"A WOMAN MOVED IS LIKE A FOUNTAIN TROUBLED."

Six months after Tresham's fruitless visit to Cora, one cold morning in January, a light wagon drove rapidly to the Willards' gat. A woman stepped out and walked slowly up the old graveled walk, followed by the driver, who carried her trunk and left it at the door.

The woman opened her purse. "Here is a quarter, 'Lonzo, for your trouble."

"No, ma'am, I can't take it. Mahse Guy would beat me ter deff ef I took that money from you," backing away from the proffered silver, with his eyes bulging, but his hands locked securely together behind him, as if out of temptation's way.

"He need never know, and I wish you to take it," she said, authoritatively.

"O, thankee, ma'am. Shall I take dey trunk inside?"

"No, go back now. Mother may be asleep and I do not wish to disturb her."

The wagon was driven away. The woman wearily mounted the steps, the door opened, and Mrs. Willard stood face to face with her daughter, who fell speechless into her mother's arms. She shed no tears, but her face was haggard and worn.

She whispered: "Mother, I have come home to stay—if you will let me."

"My poor darling, why did you not come long ago? Tresham will be so glad."

Cora trembled.

"Tresham glad? O, God—no!" she murmured.

Mrs. Willard, half-supporting her, said:

"You must lie down at once."

"In my old room, mother—not there!" as Mrs. Willard opened the parlor door. "I shall never go into that room again!"

Mrs. Willard guided Cora to a room of white and blue, which was just as she had left it, a joyous bride, five years ago.

Cora's head fell on the pillow as if she never cared to lift it again.

"I must see Tresham. I must tell you both the story at once, for I could not bear to repeat it, and Tresham *must* know, for he must be assured that I have done right in coming away as I have done—forever!"

"My darling," cried the heart-broken mother, "who can doubt that you have done right? You always have."

"If I could but have that comfort! Somehow, mother, I feel to blame for it all! How, I do not know, but I feel guilty, guilty—as if I had slain Guy's true manhood. O, what have I done? *What* have I done to change him so?" she cried wildly.

"Be quiet, love," soothed the mother. "You need sleep more than medicine. Do not reproach yourself uselessly, but lie down and try to go to sleep while I finish Tresham's dinner."

"Yes, I do need sleep. I have not slept for two nights," gazing piteously at her mother.

Mrs. Willard bit her lips hard.

"Well, now," she answered, steadily, "go to sleep, and then, as soon as you have eaten something, you shall tell us all about it. Now, now, now," and she patted Cora's hand as she used to when she was a wailing infant in her arms.

When she woke two hours later she found Tresham sitting near her, reading.

He smiled brightly, and called,

"Mother, bring the invalid's soup!"

Mrs. Willard appeared immediately with a delicately laden tray.

Tresham bolstered the thin figure up in bed, while Mrs. Willard put tid-bits between Cora's lips.

Before she knew it, Cora found herself laughing.

"Ah, that's good. Our patient is improving, Tresham," said Mrs. Willard.

"Rather," he nodded joyously.

Cora's eyes filled.

"O, mother! O, Tresham!" she said.

"I think you are strong enough for your third course now—confession."

"Now, dear."

Outside, some field-hand was singing at his task of piling rails for the spring fences.

"Ol' Raccoon met dey 'Possum,
O, 'Possum, whar yew gwine?
T'ank my soul, and bress my God,
To hunt a muscadine!"

A foolish medley, but none of the trio smiled.

It was time now to lay aside the cap and bells, and let Tragedy take her place on the stage.

"You know Guy's weakness—love of drink! For some weeks he has been worse than usual—stopping longer in the city than ever before. Late last night he came home. With him was a woman—a beautiful woman. He took her into the parlor and sent for me. I went at once. He introduced her as Madame Von Stigel. Mother—Tresham—she is notorious in Morris. Guy has more than once spoken of her to me—but, oh, I did not believe he had lost all respect for me."

Tresham hurriedly rose to his feet and paced the room, his brow crimson with anger.

Mrs. Willard held Cora's hand more firmly, saying in a low voice:

"Darling, take time—tell us to-morrow."

"No, mother, I must tell it all—now—for there is more—and worse!"

Tresham sat down.

"He commanded me to have supper and a room prepared for the woman at once. I returned to my own room without speaking. I intended to leave the house immediately, but when I tried to open my door I found it locked on the outside. Presently, Alonzo came to the door and said that Mahse Guy wished me to go down to supper. I

replied that I could not. Guy then came into the room and, pointing a revolver at me, swore that I should go. I fainted."

She paused. There was no sound in the room, save Tresham's heavy breathing. Without looking at either of her listeners, Cora resumed:

"When I came to myself, Laura told me that her master and the strange woman had supped together very merrily, and that she had prepared the room across the hall from mine for the guest. Mother, how can I tell the rest?" Her voice broke and her pale face reddened, but controlling her emotion quickly, she said:

"I must go on—I must tell it all now. This morning Guy came to me and said he insisted on my going down to breakfast. I told him I was too ill to rise and could not eat. He laughed and said he was glad to know that I had a heart, and was now suffering what I had made him suffer when I murdered our children! They went to the city this morning in our carriage. Laura packed a small trunk and Alonzo brought me. The servants all know that I have come back to you to stay!"

"When will Guy return?" asked Tresham in a low voice.

Cora looked at him piteously.

CHAPTER VIII.

"USE EVERY MAN AFTER HIS DESERT."

"TRESHAM! Promise me you will not hurt him! I know he cannot possibly live long—he is killing himself, and I forgive him—for he is not himself—he is not the man I married!"

Tresham pulled his chair close to her bedside and took her thin hands in his.

"Listen to me, my darling sister. I will not wrong the man. Promise me that you will try to get well and be our own dear Cora once more."

"I can never be that," she mournfully replied.

Tresham slipped the loose wedding-ring from her slender finger and handed it to his mother.

"Cora, you have not answered my question yet. When will this man return?"

"I do not know. Perhaps not for months—perhaps never. I did not see him after breakfast. He told me nothing of his plans."

"Well, go to sleep again, and get strong as fast as you can," and smoothing back her hair, he stooped and kissed her."

She held him fast.

"Where would you go?" she questioned fearfully, her face blanching.

"Have you forgotten that I am a poor farmer, and return to home and mother but twice a day? I must go to the 'new ground,' where Jim is cutting rails."

She loosened her clasp, with a sigh of relief, and Tresham left the room.

She held up her left hand.

"Mother, please put it back."

Mrs. Willard understood, and the ring was replaced. Cora turned on her side and closed her eyes.

"I am so tired," she said in a weak voice.

"Lie there, dear, till you are quite rested," little dreaming it would be long before she could walk again.

A brain fever held her in its grasp for many long days and nights. Guy returned from the city, and learning of Cora's flight, had expressed great relief, called congenial spirits about him, and held high revelry, when suddenly he was taken very ill, but soon recovered.

He was thinking of his insulted and outraged wife, while walking one day, when without warning he was confronted by a man.

Guy turned cold.

It had been months, since he had seen Tresham Willard, but he knew immediately who it was that faced him.

Tresham's brilliant eyes gleamed like points of cold steel, and the muscles about his mouth looked like white cords, so rigidly was it closed. His brow was livid, but his voice was cool and his manner collected.

"I am glad to meet you, Guy Allison. I have been waiting till you came forth, clothed in your right mind."

"For what do you wish to see me?" asked Guy with an appearance of ease.

"For the purpose of avenging my family honor."

"I did not know that your honor had been impugned," sneered Guy, placing his hand in his left breast pocket.

Quick as a flash, Tresham sprang forward and seized Guy's wrist as if in a vice.

"No, I cannot fight you as gentlemen fight," he said, breathing hard. "I mean to whip you like a dog, you low, sneaking hound!" Then quickly pulling Guy's hand, he brought it out of its hiding place, wrenched the pistol from its grasp, discharged it rapidly in the air, and threw it as far as his superb strength would allow, which was no mean distance.

Then swiftly and heavily fell the blows from his raw, keen cowhide—about Guy's hands, face, neck and legs.

Guy struggled fiercely with his adversary, but his

muscles, weak and enervated from his life of excesses, were no match for the other's steel-like strength.

At last Tresham's foe lay prone in the dust, begging for mercy in piteous tones.

Two neighbors rode up on horseback.

"Good God! Tresh, what are you doing?" cried they, as they slid down from their horses and helped the bruised man to a sitting posture.

"Only what any man in my place would do," Tresham retorted, throwing the whip into a clump of bushes.

"I don't know but that you are right," laughed his neighbor as he recognized Tresham's brother-in-law in the dusty, battered man. "If ever a man deserved a horsewhipping this one does;" for Cora's story was well known. "Tell you what, Guy Allison, if you don't mend your ways right soon, I'm afraid this part of the country will get too hot to hold you—it won't be good for your health."

"It's a shame to see an Allison fallen so low," added the other.

Guy sat with his head between his knees, without replying.

The men mounted their horses and rode away.

With dejected mien, Guy arose and limped homeward.

Tresham went in the opposite direction, his nerves steady, his eyes clear, and his bearing that of a prince.

That night Guy left the country to travel.

Cora learned of the rencontre, and asked Tresham, in as few words as possible, to tell her of it.

"Yes, I horsewhipped him—I promised you not to do any wrong to the man. I have not; only justice."

With no word of comment, she turned away, going to her room. She fell on her knees sobbing, and praying earnestly for her husband's reformation and—return!

What mysteries are a woman's heart and a woman's love!

Had he come to her then—had she followed the impulses of her heart, she would have gone into exile with him—borne anything to be near him!

CHAPTER IX.

"MY POVERTY, AND NOT MY WILL."

"CORRA, I can't see why you don't get a divorce from this brute. He has come back to The Elms not at all improved by his year's absence. I saw him yesterday and he is a bloated, drunken wreck."

Corra gazed steadily at her brother and said softly:

"Do you forget that I am a Southern woman? If Guy wishes a divorce, let him get one. He can, you know, on the ground of desertion."

Tresham frowned ominously.

"Yes, but I think your plea would be stronger than that."

"I shall make none whatever. I shall never enter a divorce court."

Tresham turned impatiently on the couch where he had thrown himself for his noonday rest.

"O, well, it is useless to argue with a wilful woman."

"I am not wilful, but I *am* a woman."

"Some one is coming," he lazily announced, gazing down the road which ran past the house.

"It is only a negro," said Corra. "But he is coming here. Tresham, that is John Dill, one of Guy's stable boys, and that is one of Guy's horses!"

Corra's face had grown as white as the dress she wore. She sat down, trembling in every limb.

Tresham sprang quickly from his couch.

"Very well, dear, I will see what he wants," and he walked leisurely to the door.

The negro came up the steps, extracted a letter from the lining of his hat and extended it to Tresham with the remark, "Mahse Guy done sent dis yer note ter ye."

"Very well. Is there an answer?"

"Yah, sah, he done tole me ter wait till yer done read hit."

"Sit down on the steps," he said, opening the note, which read:

"DEAR TRESHAM:

"I am anxious to see you on an important matter concerning your sister's welfare and happiness as well as my own. If you can meet me in an amiable manner, restraining your resentment sufficiently to allow us to talk in a business-like way, inform me at once where you will meet me. I forgive all past injuries and am only anxious to come to a definite understanding with you.

"Very truly,

"GUY ALLISON."

"John, tell your master that I will be with him as soon as I can saddle my horse and ride over."

"Yah, sah, I tell him 'zactly whut yer say," answered the negro, respectfully.

Cora looked apprehensively at her brother when he entered the room.

"What is it?" she asked, her lips trembling.

"Nothing, dear, to be frightened about. I came in to reassure you. Tell mother that I am gone to The Elms."

"The Elms!" she cried, springing to her feet. "O, brother! do not, do not harm my—do not harm this man!" she implored, the tears falling swiftly over her white cheeks.

He took her hands and held them firmly in his own.

"My darling sister," he said, "be comforted. Mr. Allison has sent for me on a matter of business. Read his note after I am gone," putting it into her shaking hand.

"No, no, now," she said, and eagerly read its contents.

"As I have but little time to lose from my work, instead of lolling about the house for the next hour, half asleep, I shall ride over to The Elms and see Mr. Allison. He is reasonable enough to wish to make some pecuniary

arrangement which will benefit you, I have no doubt. He should, for you can never live with him again."

"Never!" she answered.

"Certainly, he must realize that," the young man continued argumentatively, "and he also knows it is his duty to provide for your maintenance."

"O, no, no, no," she shuddered. "I can never accept *money* from him!"

"Now, dear, don't be foolish. It is his right and duty. It breaks my heart to see you living in such poverty. It is but just that he should offer and you accept some compensation for your ruined happiness."

"Do you think so?"

Tresham ground his teeth savagely. "The law thinks so, but were I able to keep you in ease and luxury, you should never accept a penny from his hands, the base villain!"

"I do not care for money."

"I know it, but money is very essential in this life. You shall always stay here, but not as our servant as you have been for the last year."

She gazed undecidedly at him a moment, then turning away, she said:

"Go!"

CHAPTER X.

"MY PRIDE FELL WITH MY FORTUNES."

TRESHAM reached The Elms after a short, swift gallop. Guy descended the front steps as Tresham alighted and tied his horse.

They met half-way up the untidy, graveled walk.

"Well," said Tresham, stopping short.

"Won't you shake hands?" asked Guy.

Tresham slowly put out his toil-calloused hand and gripped the flabby one of his brother-in-law.

Guy felt the steel in those muscles.

"I came from Morris yesterday for the purpose of talking with you."

"About what?" tersely questioned Tresham.

"Let us sit down first," and Guy placed two wicker chairs on the piazza.

"Will you smoke?" Guy offered Tresham a cigar. He waved it away as he sat down in one of the chairs.

"I have never learned the habit, and—I am no Indian!" he said abruptly.

Guy laughed uneasily.

"I understand," he said, as he lighted his cigar. "You will not smoke the calumet of peace with *me*—you are my enemy!"

"Neither your enemy, nor your friend!"

"So? very well! It is good to know the exact estimate others have of us. We can then never be deceived."

"You wished to see me. For what? My time is limited."

"About—Cora," answered Guy. "I wished to talk about her future. Can you tell me what *she* wishes?"

"I only know that she will never return to you."

Something like relief shone in Guy's eyes, and his face cleared wonderfully.

"Tresham, I am going to be perfectly candid, and I beg you to listen with patience to what I am about to say."

"Go on," laconically replied Tresham.

"Cora and I have grown apart—we are no longer congenial;" he paused a moment, but Tresham maintained a stolid silence. "If we are to live apart, do not you think a legal separation would be better?"

"I do!"

Guy drew a long breath of relief.

"I wish a divorce——"

"So does she."

The other looked surprised. It was going to be very easy, after all, he thought.

"I shall be generous in my settlement with her."

Tresham's proud lips grew white.

"She has greater cause for complaint than I. Will she take the initiative?"

"She will not. You can easily procure a divorce from her on the plea of desertion, but Cora Willard neither shall nor will enter a court-room arrayed against you. If I can act in her stead I will, but she shall have nothing to do with the foul proceedings of a court-room," Tresham hotly declared.

"You will make it very disagreeable for me, I see, Willard, but you are right. I am a villain, a drunkard, and a fool. I deserve to be shown up in my real colors. I hope Cora may yet be happy——"

"I hope so, too," interrupted the other.

"—And if money will add to her——"

Tresham rose so hastily, his chair overturned.

"Stop! There must be no sentiment between us; but when you speak of *money* restoring to her all that she has lost through you, I feel like strangling you where you sit!" then he righted his chair and sat down, breathing hard.

Guy turned livid.

"Very well, I have no desire to talk sentiment. Business it shall be."

"Proceed."

"I shall try to procure a divorce without Cora's assistance, on the plea of desertion——"

"Yes."

"I will give or allow her five hundred dollars a month, to be paid quarterly—but stop! Will that be sufficient?"

"If I were able to give her one five hundredth of that a year, she should not accept one penny from you—yes, that will be more than sufficient."

"You make it very hard for me. Alex!" and a servant came out promptly with a bottle of wine and two glasses on a waiter. Guy hastily filled the glasses and pushed one towards Tresham, who shook his head.

"Thanks, but I have never learned to drink."

A slow red burned in Guy's face, but he emptied his glass.

Tresham rose.

"Have you anything more to say now? If not, I am due in my fields," looking up at the sun, his only time-piece.

Guy courteously rose, too.

"I think of nothing else now. It is disagreeable for you to be with me——"

"It is."

"You have shown it plainly, so if I have any further communications to make, it will be through my attorney."

"I applaud your decision. Good afternoon."

"Good-by. I wish I could have made your visit more pleasant."

They were at the gate whither Guy had followed his unwilling guest, and Tresham vaulted into his saddle before replying:

"I hope, Guy, you will check your career of dissipation and not die in the gutter."

"Which is sure to be my fate sooner or later," Guy lightly responded. "I am sober to-day—I have been sober a week, and shall try to retain my senses till all this

disagreeable law business is over. I leave for Morris to-night."

"Good-by," muttered Tresham, abruptly wheeling his horse.

"I should have become as soft a fool as he had I remained a moment longer. I wish I could hate him as he deserves, poor, weak, drunken—thing!"

CHAPTER XI.

"WHAT A PIECE OF WORK IS MAN."

It was half-past five that afternoon and Cora had just come out of old Nancy's little yard, when the sound of a horse's feet made her look around. Her bonnet (a quiet white affair of muslin and embroidery) fell from her neck.

As the horseman came nearer he looked at the woman, and reined his horse in with a start.

"Cora!" he exclaimed.

She stood clasping the fence, trembling violently.

"My—God!" came struggling from the depths of her suffering heart and escaped from her pale lips.

Guy dismounted with alacrity, and leading his horse, approached her.

"Cora, is it possible!" he cried, holding out a hand that shook violently, but which she did not see.

"Why are you here?" she asked coldly.

He laughed constrainedly.

"I do not know. I had no thought of meeting you, for this house is not on your brother's plantation."

"No, but Nancy was my nurse, and she is old and feeble. I do what I can for her."

She stooped and picked up the basket which had fallen at her feet, drew her sunbonnet over her face and turned to go.

Guy placed himself before her.

"Stay! Why are you in such a hurry? I leave this part of the country to-night—we may never meet again."

"I never want to see you again," she answered icily, her trembling limbs and beating heart belying her words.

O, how she longed to put her arms about him, and beg him to once more be her true and loving sweetheart—her

husband of the long ago! She stood passively, waiting for him to move aside.

"Of course Tresham told you what passed between us to-day?" he said.

"I have not seen Tresham since his return from The Elms."

"No? Then why are you so cold to me if you do not know my wishes for your future?"

He watched her eagerly, and she turned away her eyes as she answered:

"I will wait till Tresham tells me what your wishes are—I do not care to have *you* tell me."

"I'm glad, for I do not think I could have the courage—now. Cora—do you know that you are still the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"Let me pass, Guy Allison," her lips curling in scorn. He did not move.

"Cora, it is not too late! Can you not forgive me?—can you not come back to me—as my wife?"

"No, no, no," she said, with a shudder. "So long as I cannot forget, I cannot forgive! Go, go at once!"

"You certainly have little faith in woman's good influence. I believe now that if you were to come back to me, I could become a good man—with your help."

"Never! Never!—No, I have no faith in woman's influence over an evil man. *You* have taught me the fallacy of that popular theory. If a man have no moral strength, no woman can infuse any into him. Guy Allison, you have much to answer to me. Through you, I almost lost my faith in God—my faith in prayer—for, oh, if prayers are *ever* answered, surely some of mine for you would long ago have been made manifest. I have no faith in your reformation, or happiness for myself. Go your way—I will go mine. I tried many years to save you. I prayed and I hoped that my faith in you might not be lost. But it is! Forever!"

With these words, she pushed him aside and swiftly passed him.

He stood as she left him; head bowed on his breast and weak, maudlin tears dripping down his bloated face.

Forever!

The word sounded like the death-knell of his soul.

Slowly he mounted his impatient horse and rode away.

The next day, after a night of deep potations, his valet succeeded in getting him sober enough to take the journey to Morris.

The Elms was closed indefinitely.

CHAPTER XII.

CHANGE.

CORA never told Tresham or her mother of her chance encounter with her recreant husband.

The legal proceedings for the divorce went on, and at last the day came when Cora was pronounced free from every tie that bound her to Guy Allison; but the past was indissolubly bound to him. Her tender woman's soul bowed in almost mortal anguish when she thought of her broken vow—

“Till death us do part!”

Was she to blame?

These sad reflections did not sting her long, for during the year the papers chronicled the death of “The Last Allison,” whose brilliant drunken fêtes were long remembered in Morris, where his death occurred. He willed all his vast wealth—which his mother had augmented by selling her cotton and all her slaves for gold before the latter were declared free—to Cora Willard, his divorced wife.

The Elms was sold.

“I could never again live among the haunting memories of that house,” she said.

Then she persuaded Tresham to restore to its pristine splendor the old Willard Mansion, as their homestead had been called in its days of ancient grandeur.

After this was done, she persuaded her mother and brother to travel with her.

“O, you do not know how happy it makes me to have you with me,” she said as they sat on the deck of a splendid steamer.

“It does not seem right for me to loaf,” returned Tresham.

"Why, brother, all machines have to be stopped for repair occasionally," she said, gaily.

"Thank God! the spring of her youth is not quite broken. It still answers to her will," Tresham decided, looking happily at his sister's animated face.

Ah, who can wonder at man's greed for gold? Can it not give us everything we wish?

After a year of leisure and travel, they returned to America, and Cora told Tresham that she was to give him a "coming out" party in their renovated home. She preferred life on their plantation to the gayer one of the city, although social duties called her there occasionally. She was acknowledged one of the reigning beauties, for with her freedom from care and sorrow, Cora's lost youth returned, and she was more beautiful than in her younger days.

"You will never succeed in making me an ornament of the *beau monde*," Tresham retorted to his sister's laughing threat.

"Nor do I wish to, but I should dearly love to see my proud brother take his proper place in the world—a leader of men—perhaps our future Governor."

"My proper place seems to follow the example of Cincinnati."

In her heart Cora thought her brother the best man she had ever known.

"How would you like me to invite my friend Robert down for the reception?" he said, and was pleased to see an added brightness in his sister's cheek.

"Poor fellow! Do you think he will come?"

"I have no doubt of it, if *you* should ask him."

"I will write him a note, which you shall deliver with your own hands."

Robert Langsdale, a struggling lawyer in the city of Morris, was forthwith favored with a dainty invitation.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SO WE GREW TOGETHER."

ROBERT LANGSDALE met Cora frequently in Morris, and thought her the loveliest of her sex.

Tresham and he were stanch friends.

"I'm sorry, old man, that I can't go," he said after reading the note.

"Can't go? Do you think I would dare carry such a message back to my sister?"

"I do not think a poor devil like me should take the time to drink from Pleasure's cup when Necessity frowns upon it."

"Nonsense. The change will benefit you more than whole pages of Blackstone."

"Perhaps," the other reluctantly admitted.

"Remember, you are to come down on the train with our other guests from Morris."

The young lawyer smiled. He was a handsome fellow, although critics might think him too pale and slender. His large black eyes flashed with a rare intelligence, and his dark, silky hair, brushed back in careless waves from a white brow, gave him more the appearance of a poet than a grave student of law. He was an orphan and poor, but the generosity of an uncle had given him a fine education and fitted him for the bar. He was still struggling with poverty, for all the world fears to trust its interests to a young lawyer. However, few of us are so poor that we do not have hope, and Robert Langsdale had added to this hope a determined will and vaulting ambition.

The iconoclastic railroad had penetrated Tresham's plantation, adding to its value and destroying much of its seclusion. So the guests were taken very near the house

to the new station, where carriages waited to carry them to the house, which was visible for miles. It sat on a hill, and was brilliantly illuminated.

Nothing can equal the feeling one has on entering the broad portals of these old-time Southern mansions, where hospitality was once dispensed on such a royal scale—where every man felt himself a prince. A few of them remain, that almost equal their forefathers in the hospitality which will always remain in the South as long as a true Southerner calls it home.

Robert felt the air which seemed to embrace each guest as he entered the wide doors. The broad mantelpieces were banked with flowers from their gardens, and the yawning fireplaces were filled with delicate ferns from their own wooded river banks.

Mr. Langsdale bowed low over the white hand that Cora laid in his that night, while a thrill went through his heart. Have *you* ever felt it, oh, reader mine? It was new to him—so new, he thought no man had ever felt it before.

How beautiful she was!

Clad in gleaming white, a diamond star twinkling in her golden hair, and jewels holding the delicate lace at her white throat, she looked an unattainable star to this son of Poverty, and the warmth at his heart turned cold. During the evening Cora discovered him leaning disconsolately against the wall. There was a misty light in his eyes and a downward curve to his usually firm lips, which plainly told an interested observer that his heart was not in the gaiety about him.

"Mr. Langsdale," said a voice that brought him up-right at once, "I consider it very disloyal for one of my guests to be as palpably bored as you are."

"Can't a lawyer look at the world while it goes by without being accused of *ennui*?"

"Certainly not, when that world is allowed to slip by without being of the slightest interest to him."

"Oh—um——"

"Your thoughts were a thousand miles away. You did not see a single person in this room when I came up."

He bowed gravely. "I agree with you. I did not see any other person in this room when you came up."

"O, fie! Mr. Langsdale, I did not wish to extort a compliment from you."

"I do not give idle compliments."

"O, no, certainly not; all Southern women understand and believe that their chevaliers always mean exactly what they say," she said, laughing that low, mellow laugh it delighted him to hear.

"I am a Virginian."

"They, of all men, pay the prettiest compliments."

"Miss Cora, take my arm, and let's go into the garden. You seem fond of country life," he said.

"I love my old home and birthplace. Tresham loves farming, and of course it goes without saying that mama loves this place so endeared to her by a thousand memories."

"You are not entirely averse to town life?" he asked.

"We spend six months of the year roaming about and in town; the other six we spend here for Tresham's sake, and while I love the country, I do not think I should like to be forced to stay here without intermission."

He seemed to brighten at this admission.

"Town life, of course, will be mine until I am able to retire to the country, which will probably be fifty years hence."

She looked up at him sympathetically, while she said softly:

"If I were a man, I should like to battle with the world—should like to pit my mental artillery against the small guns of others."

He pressed the little hand lying on his arm.

"Yes, contact with other and more alert minds is a necessity," he confessed.

"So it is with all minds that would grow. Most of my life has been spent here—in these grounds—this house—and during my girlhood I knew what severe manual labor was."

They were under a tree that had a lantern hanging from its branches.

He paused, laid his hand again on hers, and looked eagerly in her saddened face.

"Excuse me—but why?"

"Do you not know why?" she asked, surprised at his question, for she felt every one knew her sad life story.

"You forget," he said gently. "I have known you but a year. I have been in Morris but little more than that time."

"What have you heard?" she asked faintly.

"Your husband is dead—I knew that," he began hesitatingly, "but—nothing more."

She drew a deep sigh.

"I felt the whole world knew my story, but I am glad that I am the first to tell it to you. My husband is dead, but I was a divorced wife two years before he died," she added, in so faint a voice he had to bend low to catch her words. They had never discussed personalities before.

"You—you do not ask why this disgrace was mine," she continued.

"If there was any disgrace, the fault was not yours," he answered readily.

"Thank you for your trust," she replied gratefully. "I do not know—sometimes I think it must have been my fault—but how, I do not know. My husband drank deeply."

They walked along in silence for some moments.

This confidence was very sweet—but dangerous. Langsdale had a well-disciplined heart. He knew that love and marriage were not for him—yet.

Suddenly they were roused from their dreaming by a shrill cry:

"Miss Cora, oh, Miss Cora!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"DISEASED NATURE OFTENTIMES BREAKS."

"WHAT can it mean?" cried Cora, hastening towards the house. "I am so afraid," she murmured. "It has been my fate when I felt happiest to have a thunderbolt fall out of a clear sky."

The house was brilliantly lighted, but the music and laughter were hushed. Forms flitted about in a hurried manner, and groups stood motionless, talking in low tones.

Tresham advanced as they came up the steps, and took her hand in a masterful, but soothing way.

"What is it, brother?" she asked, with a feeling of relief that danger had passed over his head.

"Our mother!"

Cora shrank back, covering her face with both hands.

"No, dear, it is not that—she is not dead, but it is paralysis."

Tresham, putting one arm about her waist, forced her forward.

A short while before, Mrs. Willard, seemingly in the best of health and spirits, was talking to a friend, when suddenly her speech was arrested, and the friend, looking up, found her lying back in her chair as one dead. She quickly gave the alarm, and her sad call for Cora filled the night air.

There were about forty guests from Morris, but the old mansion had held more than that in *ante-bellum* days, and Tresham coming in to the disconsolate guests at this moment, assured them that all arrangements for the entertainment would be carried through without disturbing his mother in the least.

"She is now better," he announced, with a cheerful

face but a sinking heart. "You can do my mother no harm, and your first intention of remaining to breakfast can be as well carried out now as before," he said, going up to each group who inquired solicitously about conveyances and his mother's health in the same breath.

The spirit of festivity had effervesced and it was a subdued party that gathered around the tables in the long dining-room three hours later.

"Mother seems a little better," Cora informed Mr. Langsdale, who sat next her at supper.

She was pale, but composed, and Mr. Langsdale looked gravely solicitous, but I fear more on his own account than Mrs. Willard's, for he would not now be able to see Cora alone before his departure.

"Perhaps it is best," he said to himself. "For *qui bono*? I am a poor devil of a lawyer, while she is wealthy. I love her, it is true, but I shall never tell her so, unless our fortunes change. She is not for me."

"You must be studying some points in your next case, Mr. Langsdale, for I have asked you twice if you would have more coffee."

"No, thank you. I was trying to solve a very knotty problem, but confess I am unable to unravel it—yet," he gravely responded.

"Perhaps woman's wit might help you," Cora smilingly suggested.

"Not here, I fear."

"O, women are really better natural lawyers than you think. Do you know, I have sometimes wished that I had been able to choose and practise a profession. I have no doubt that the world will be a better place when we have more women to fill what are called men's offices, and that day is not far off."

"How about women's offices? Who would fill them?" asked Robert.

"O, there will always be plenty of commonplace women to fill them," Cora answered with assumed carelessness.

"Does it require only commonplace women to perform the duties that pertain to a woman's sphere?" asked a grave gentleman at the foot of their table.

Mrs. Dalton, on Cora's left, took up the conversation.

"I think not, and I do not believe any man could half do all the little duties that come in a woman's daily life."

"Man never reflects that woman's strength is not equal to her will, and he laughs and tells his masculine friends that if they were to pay attention to their wives' complaints, houses would be turned into hospitals and men into nurses."

"Train time!" called a masculine voice from the doorway, and looking around our little party of six found that the room was empty.

"Good gracious! We'll be left!" cried Mrs. Dalton in dismay, as she hurried out of the room, followed by the others.

Robert purposely tarried.

"May I come out soon and inquire about your mother?" he asked, holding out his hand to Cora.

"I thank you for your kind sympathy, Mr. Langsdale. Come by all means."

He gazed at her for a moment wistfully, then stooped and kissed the white hand which he held, and hurriedly took his departure.

Cora returned to her mother's room, and was standing by the bedside gazing sadly into her white face, when Tresham came in.

"O, Tresham, what does Dr. Dale say now?"

"He cannot tell the result."

"Poor mother! Now that I have the means to recompense her for all those years of poverty so patiently and bravely borne, my money is worthless, worthless!"

CHAPTER XV.

SHE DREAMS.

NEITHER science nor money could save that mother's life, although the two combined can move mountains and tunnel seas. When we would hold the loved one back from the brink—when we would pray, "Yet a little longer abide with me!" the weary spirit shuns the detaining hands of earth and slips away.

Where?

Who can tell?

Cora's grief was so great, after her mother's death, Tresham put his affairs in order quickly and took her to California.

The two weeks that this consumed, he insisted she should spend in Morris, where Robert saw her daily. There never was a truer axiom than that "The voice of fate is the impulse of the soul." Acting on impulse is universally denounced, but I hold to the theory that *first* thoughts are best, and the more impulses that we yield to the more happiness we will find—the more unfortunates will be helped—the finer virtues will flourish—the softer hearts will be—the more love will shed its blessed light over this weary, reeling world.

Robert let her go without telling her his hopes.

"Time enough when she comes back, and perhaps Fortune will have smiled on me by then," he muttered as he shook hands with her the morning she went away.

She was gone six months.

Much as Cora had suffered in the past, and deep as was her present grief for her mother, there occurred during those six months the one thing that was to cause her more anguish than she had ever endured; for she was older,

and her capabilities were greater, her emotions deeper, and her heart stronger.

Cora and Robert had occasionally written to each other, but for a month past she had had no letter from him, and from his letters she understood she was the one woman in the world to him. He was sensitive, poor and proud! She felt a sense of delicacy alone prevented him from asking her the one question that was uppermost in her mind. She smiled as she told herself that she were a simple woman indeed if she could not find means to overcome his scruples; so she decided to bide her time. It is when we feel most secure that the shock comes which awakens us from our sweetest dreams. They traveled slowly, and it was early spring when they came back to the old plantation. In a few days Tresham found it necessary to run up to Morris.

"Want to go, Cora?"

"No, I think not. I'd rather remain here and see to a few necessary changes after our long absence. Perhaps you will think to bring a friend or two out with you."

Tresham looked at her mischievously, reading her thoughts.

"He'll be sure to come if I ask him," he said.

"Who?" and she looked up as innocently as only a very young child or a good actress can, and where is there a better actress than the woman who wishes to hide her heart?

"Why, *he*, of course."

Tresham went out of the room laughing, mounted his horse and rode to the little station two miles away.

"The absurd man!" she muttered, with flushed cheeks.

Nothing annoys a woman more than not to be able to hide a secret from a man. She feels that her wit is getting dull, and the knowledge stings her.

When Tresham returned he was alone. Cora met him wistfully.

"I wonder if you will care?" he asked.

"For what?" she said, the white in her face quickly taking the place of the red.

"For what I have to tell you."

"Tresham, do not tease me. Why do you look at me in that way?"

"Think! Have you nothing to lose?"

"You! O, Tresham, are you going to marry?"

It was his turn to change color.

"Nothing is further from my thoughts."

"Tresham, do not tease me. If it is a new trouble, I can bear it. Have I ever shown myself a coward?"

"Not often. Well, then, little sister, Robert Langsdale has removed, lock, stock and barrel, to Washington."

He felt a tremor run through her form, but that was the sole sign that the news had affected her.

"Removed?"

"Yes, and why, no one knows."

"It is strange he did not tell us his intentions in his last letter."

"He has been gone two weeks."

"Perhaps he will write from Washington."

"Perhaps."

But he did not—to her.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN AFT GANG
AGLEY."

It was about five months after Cora's departure for the West, as Robert Langsdale sat moodily in his office one day, a man came in.

"Hey, old boy! Down in the mouth?"

"No, why?"

"I thought you looked melancholy. Where are your thoughts?"

"Where yours ought to be—on my business."

His friend laughed boisterously.

"I'll bet something pretty they are not."

Robert frowned.

"Look here, Stenson, I'm really busy to-day, so if you don't mind, I shall be obliged if you take yourself off."

"Can't, I'm sorry to say, for I have exactly half an hour to spare, and I have made up my mind to waste it on you, and to talk about the subject nearest your heart. In fact, to warn you."

"To warn me? My good friend, I think I am able to take care of myself, so reserve your warnings for weaker people. When I want your advice, I'll pay for it."

"You'll not be so high-flying in a few moments. In a word, I warn you against the fascinating widow."

Robert looked at him uncomprehendingly, at which Stenson lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Such innocence!"

Robert's face crimsoned furiously.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Mrs. Allison!"

In a trice Robert had his hand at Stenson's throat.

"Dare to say one word against her, and I will strangle you."

"Hold on! hold on!" sputtered Stenson, moving his head from side to side, but not attempting to defend himself.

Robert, deadly pale, loosened his crasp, and sat down; his large eyes were flashing and he breathed hard.

"Apologize!" he shouted.

Stenson sat up, and joined his hands together on his chest.

"Why, man, I've said nothing. May I ask you a few questions?"

Robert waved his hand affirmatively.

"Now promise me you won't fly at my throat like a bulldog, and remember, no matter what I say, I do not mean it offensively."

"Go on."

"All the world knows you love Mrs. Allison," Stenson began cautiously.

Robert flushed, but said calmly: "I am proud to admit it."

"I am glad to have the report confirmed by your own lips. May I go on?"

"Say all you have to say, then get out of my office."

"Perhaps you wish to marry her——"

"Stop!"

"Great Heavens, man, how can I tell you if you will not let me?"

"Go on," Robert repeated.

"I have no doubt you believe Mrs. Allison a widow. Mr. Allison is not dead. He is in an insane asylum. Go to his old home—perhaps you will find his name on a tombstone—perhaps not."

Robert's face was livid.

"Do you mean that Mrs. Allison has deceived me?"

"I do. To prove it, ask Benby. He knows the whole story. Perhaps you are engaged to her——"

"I'm not."

"So much the better. Richer and better men than you have loved her, but she refuses them all. Of course you

do not wish this talked about, and I thought it my duty as a friend to warn you in time. If you wish my story verified, I'll send Benby around."

Stenson arose.

"You assure me that Mr. Allison is living, and in an asylum?"

"I do."

"Very well. Please go."

His friend went out laughing to himself. "I've set a brand burning that will make a big fire, if I'm not a false prophet. He's the kind that burns his bridges, too. If she wouldn't marry me, she shall not marry any other man—if I can help it."

Meanwhile, Robert, left alone, sank into his chair.

"Cora would n^ot lie; she *told* me her husband was dead. Who can I trust if she is false? I will not believe it—I'll write and ask her," and he drew paper and pen towards him.

"No, that would be an insult, for she told me she was a widow. Perhaps, being sore and sensitive about her troubles, she says that to avoid discussion, but she would not deceive me—no, a thousand times no!"

In spite of his love for Cora, unconsciously, he found himself dwelling on his *soi-disant* friend's words, which greatly disturbed his peace of mind. Being high-minded, he never suspected the plot, concocted for a double purpose by two pettifoggers, to injure his law practice, and his happiness and, if possible, to make him leave the place.

"I can't believe it. Why should I think of it? In a few weeks she will be here, then I shall ask her. But what right have I? If she chooses to keep her secret, I am only a friend—I can never be anything more!"

He cautiously asked Benby some questions, whose answers only confirmed his partner's words. Soon after his acquaintances heard that Robert Langsdale had left for Washington, but only two people knew why he had gone, and they never told.

CHAPTER XVII.

"LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW."

A few weeks after there came a letter to Tresham, from Robert. It was friendly, but it did not tell why he had left Morris; his only message to Cora was: "My kindest regards to your sister."

She listened to it in silence. She could not understand why he had gone away, and felt that she had been most unjustly treated by this man, whose love she had felt she possessed.

"O, dear Lord! How can I bear this sorrow all my life! How can I live without him—he who holds my soul in thralldom—he whose slave I would be!"

Pale, tearless, Cora lay outstretched on the rug before her fire, feeling that life itself was leaving her as she realized her loss. She believed he had gone away to place an inseparable barrier between them.

"How can I bear to give him up! How can I see him give his name and love to another!" jealousy leaping quickly into life. "How can I live and know he has forgotten me! Dearest, *do* not forget me—*do* not forsake me! I have lost him! I have lost him! Lord, let me die!"

Silent and motionless she lay there. Ah, how terrible this love is! We laugh at it—we sneer at it! And we call men sentimental fools, who plainly show that they have hearts! In the world's creed it is a sin to have a heart, and all fine fancies are cruelly rent by those who cannot weave them. See this woman, now!

Young, lovely, wealthy, with a multitude of friends ready to become lovers, and a devoted brother to gratify her every wish—yet she cries out for the possession of

one more human heart—for the warm, throbbing love of that man whose silence towards her is cruel as the grave, and far less merciful. Why are we given this capacity for suffering? Why is sorrow more plenteous in our lives than joy and happiness?

Tresham answered Robert's brief epistle, but there came no reply.

Cora gave no sign of the awful grief which had plunged her soul in darkness—struck her dumb with anguish—and killed hope, joy, youth, and ambition. She smiled while her heart was breaking! She jested and laughed while she felt that she was dying!

"What to me would be all the world, since I have lost him—what to me would be heaven itself if he were not there?"

Another year had been rolled up and put by in the great storehouse of Father Time. Cora shrank from hearing Robert's name—it seemed like profanation when another would laugh and speak lightly of him. He was her beloved. She had no other name for him.

Often when she seemed the gayest of a group such thoughts as these were burning in her brain:

"He thinks he has done right—but, oh, my beloved, you have cruelly wronged me. If I could only know why you went away, but I dare not ask and you will never tell— O, yes, I thought that by far the prettiest costume at the *bal-masque*, Mrs. Dalton."

We are speaking animals, and we are the only animals who possess the gift of expressing our thoughts in words, but is it not true that words are given us to conceal our thoughts? Who of us can, or will, tell what we think?

So the year went by and no explanation was vouchsafed by Robert. One day, when Tresham had ridden to the post-office for his mail, he opened a paper that bore the postmark of Washington, and which had a blue pencil line running over an announcement.

Tresham grew pale as he read.

"I would not have believed it of him," he muttered. "Poor Cora! Poor little girl! How will she bear *this*? Does she think I am blind and have not seen how she has

suffered? How bravely she has tried to hide it! Was he a scoundrel, or only a fool?"

Cora met him with her usual bright smile, but her quick eye noted the grave lines about his mouth.

"Has your mail brought you bad news, Tresham?" she asked.

"O, no, only a surprise."

"What is it?"

"Come in, and I will tell you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW FACE.

To say that Robert Langsdale was a happy man would not be true.

After his arrival in Washington, his first trouble—apart from his heart—was an empty pocketbook. He was far more fortunate, however, than that multitude that is continually setting forth to seek fortune.

He knew no one in the city, but his uncle had two friends there. These he sought out.

"My uncle has educated me for law. I have a few brains, but no money. Can you recommend me?"

They said they would consider him, and unlike the majority of such promises, they really did to such extent that before he had been in the city a month, he was asked to be assistant counsel in a noted case. He worked well and faithfully, and cases began to come to him; he saw nothing of that brilliant, changeable element we call Society in our American Court city.

How often Cora's image came before him! For he did love her, deeply.

"If she deceived me it was because she was so unhappy. She is pure and proud, and does not wish me to know her disgrace. My lost love! Do you wonder why I left you? Do you wonder why I cannot even write to you? I once thought my poverty was the only bar between us—I did not dream that you were an unhappy wife."

For Robert Langsdale was a devout Christian, and he firmly believed that although Cora was a divorced wife, so long as her husband lived, in or out of an asylum, she was his wife. What a purgatory some of us make of this beautiful world! Why could not Robert Langsdale be

happy in the smiles of another woman? Why could he not see the good that was in his life? Why could he not mold his heart to his will? Ah, why?

Gradually he was drawn into society through his two influential friends. He met many lovely women, but so perverse is man's heart, their attractions were naught with Cora's charms.

He was a great favorite with mothers, for he loved their children, but the young women voted him stiff and uninteresting—in fact, a bore!

Miss Lily Wilde was a great belle, and all men fell captive to her charms. Great was her pique then when she discovered that Robert Langsdale did not succumb to her fascinations.

"I believe the man is a fool," she told her mother confidentially.

Whereat Mrs. Wilde smiled.

"Your uncle says he is one of the brightest young men at the bar."

"Uncle is an old fogey," retorted the young lady from her couch, languidly closing her eyes.

Mrs. Wilde was a rich widow, and this her only child. Easy to see, then, that Lily was a spoilt creature and oftener vexed than gladdened her doting mother, but the world praised her as a paragon. The world forgives much to a rich, pretty woman. She was affectionate, talented, brilliant and beautiful, it said.

"I've made up my mind to bring that man to my feet," she cried, starting up with such energy the pink color suffused her face.

"Who wants the adoration of a fool?" her mother repeated, mercilessly.

"O, of course I mean that he was a dunce because he did not admire me!"

"So there are degrees of stupidity?"

"Why, certainly, mama, and you are a stupid goose not to know it."

"It is not very respectful to call your mother a goose," said the weak woman, somewhat angrily.

Lily yawned wearily.

"O, it is not worth while to quarrel about so palpable a truth. And, mama, I know that I am your heiress. Suppose I should take it into my head to marry a poor man? What would be the consequences?"

"What result could ensue but unhappiness?"

"Why should a woman be unhappy if she marries a poor man?"

"I can't explain it, but it seems to be a natural law that poverty kills love."

"I should be rich."

"Lily!" cried her startled mother, "what notion is this?"

"Nothing," she answered absently.

"If we are going to Mrs. Cold's to-night, it is high time you were getting a nap. Do go to sleep," and Mrs. Wilde went out of the room.

"O, this wearisome life! I mean to make that man love me, for I know so well what my life will be if I marry any of the fashionable noodles who dangle after my purse-strings. If Robert Langsdale loved me, he would care nothing for my money. O, how tired I am of it all! I wish I were really poor. The working women I sometimes come in contact with seem the only happy people. We drag out our days pursuing the phantom happiness which flees further and further away. How tired, *how* tired I am!" and Lily Wilde buries her pretty face in the soft satin cushions.

To live for self and the gratification of all her fancies. That was her creed. She had never helped any one and her entire life had been a vacuum!

CHAPTER XIX.

WEAVING A WEB.

"LILY, Lily, what a lazy girl!"

Lily opened her gray eyes languidly.

"Mother, I was sleeping so sweetly. Why did you waken me?" she cried irritably.

"You asked me to. Last night you went to bed in a temper, and this morning you are in no sweeter humor."

"Why didn't you let me sleep, then, and I should at least not be annoying you now?" Lily answered saucily.

Mrs. Wilde sat down and put a handkerchief to her eyes. "What an undutiful daughter I have," she moaned.

Lily snatched the dry handkerchief from her mother's hand.

"Mama, you were not born for an actress, and I can't endure shamming. Be kind enough to ring the bell."

Mrs. Wilde, with a heavy sigh, pulled the old-fashioned bell-cord near her daughter's head.

"Fifine, why did you allow my mother to awaken me?" as her maid entered.

"O, Mees—O, Madam——" stammered the confused girl.

"Since the deed has been done," added Lily in an agrieved manner, "get me some chocolate at once."

Mrs. Wilde rose and looked at her daughter reproachfully.

"I hope to heaven, Lily, that you will never be a mother!"

Lily laughed mirthlessly.

"And I hope to heaven that I will never be cursed with such an unhappy child as you have!"

"God pity you if you are," and her mother left the room.

Such scenes were daily occurrences.

"What time is it, Fifine?" Lily asked, as she sipped her foaming chocolate.

"Just twelve, mademoiselle," returned the maid, as she arranged a dark blue cloth riding habit on a chair.

"Great heaven! how badly I feel! Perhaps a canter, though, will brighten me up." Lily sighed.

"It is sure to, Mees."

"If only that despicable little Allen were not to be with me," complained the heiress.

"It is a lovely day for a ride, Miss Lily," observed her companion, as he lifted her to her seat.

"*Couldn't* you find something more original to say than that?" said Lily, looking mischievously at him as he flung himself into the saddle with the easy graco characteristic of the Southern man.

"I spoke with my lips. Perhaps I could say something original if I spoke from my heart."

"Have you such an organ?" she laughed.

"Alas, no," sighed he, "for it passed out of my keeping a long time ago."

"How sad! Pray, how does it feel to be without a heart?"

He looked at her mocking lips with an air of commiseration.

"Don't you know?"

"Not I, for I possess an extremely healthy one."

"I believe you," he answered, bitterly.

"Let us ride down this way," she curtly commanded.

"What for? That is the unloveliest part of the town—nothing but dingy lawyers' offices."

"The very reason I wish to go," the perverse girl insisted.

He gave her a keen glance.

"It is true, then?"

"What?"

"What all our world is telling—your penchant for the Alabama lawyer."

"Certainly it is true, I am devotedly fond of him,"

she laughed, and a little jealousy warned him that there was a bit of truth in her careless words.

"You mean every word you say?" he anxiously inquired.

"Of course I do."

"There is the fellow now!" exclaimed Mr. Allen in disgust.

"Good morning, Mr. Langsdale." Lily bowed easily and smiled charmingly, reining in her horse as Robert Langsdale approached from an opposite direction, and stood before them.

Robert saluted them both gravely.

"Do you ever ride, Mr. Langsdale?" she asked, teasing her horse's ears by flicking her whip.

"Not now," he answered, raising his great, melancholy eyes to her, and smiling a little.

"Why not?"

"For several reasons. I have no time, and no horse."

"Mama has two fine saddle horses. Can you not come to-morrow and try one? Riding is my favorite amusement."

"I think you have several ways of amusing yourself—all favorite pastimes," broke in Mr. Allen, rudely.

Lily laughed sweetly, covertly watching Robert.

"It is even so, Mr. Allen," she agreed.

"But you have not answered me," and Lily turned to Robert again, tapping his shoulder with her whip, at which Mr. Allen frowned till his brows met.

"Would it be best?"

"Do we ever ask ourselves that question when we are seeking pleasure?" she asked coquettishly.

"Not many of us."

"It would certainly be a pleasure to *me* for you to go."

"You are very kind. I shall be delighted to go. Good morning," he said.

And the twain rode away, Mr. Allen scowling, Lily smiling happily.

"What you can find in that lanky person to admire, I confess I can't see."

"It is a good thing that everybody does not admire

the same thing," she answered coolly. "Perhaps in this case, your eyes are defective. We have a very good oculist in Washington," she advised.

"Perhaps I would better consult you, if I would see with your eyes."

"Certainly not—in this case," she mocked.

"Jesting aside, Miss Lily"—and he looked very grave—"have you considered?"

"Yes," she answered, firmly.

"And——"

"And I must say no, again."

"You are perfectly heartless."

"I am perfectly sincere. I shall not marry a man whom I do not love. And you I do not love, Mr. Allen."

He ground his teeth in anger.

"It is that cursed fool, Langedale, who has come between us."

Her steel-gray eyes contracted dangerously.

"I would not marry *you* if my life depended on it."

Then tightening her reins, she gave first his horse then hers a stinging blow with her little whip.

The maddened animals dashed away.

Their riders found it difficult to manage them, and there was no further conversation until they drew up before the house.

"Pray, do not trouble to come in, Mr. Allen, and—it will not be necessary for you to call any more, for I shall not be at home," and with head haughtily erect, Lily walked steadily up the steps, and the heavy hall door clanged behind her.

CHAPTER XX.

"I DON'T WANT HIS LOVE, BUT I WILL MARRY HIM."

"MOTHER, I can never be happy until I become his wife!"

Lily Wilde sat at her mother's feet, her arms thrown in her lap, her face lying in them. It was the attitude of despair. Evidently the girl suffered.

Mrs. Wilde sighed.

"My darling, I have given you everything I could, but this is not possible. Love cannot be bought—I cannot buy this man's love for you."

"I do not want his love, but I *will* marry him!"

"Child, you are mad! Will you propose to him?"

"No, mama, but there is a way to do it. You are a woman of the world, and understand men. Robert Langsdale has his price!"

Mrs. Wilde shuddered.

"All men and women have theirs. I have mine. I would give my *soul* to be this man's wife!"

Mrs. Wilde pushed Lily away, rose, and walked up and down the room in great agitation.

"Lily, Lily, what fearful thing would you do? Neither of us are Christian women, for I was not taught even the first principles of that faith, so how could I teach you? We are not praying women, so how can I console you now? It pains me to see you suffer, but how can I help you?"

Lily stared fixedly at her mother, muttering over and over:

"I must be his wife! I must be his wife!"

"Lily, you will drive me mad!" cried the poor mother who had devoted her life to her daughter's whims, but who realized this day the futility of her efforts as she watched her wretched child's helpless despair.

"Mother, do you think if he knew how I loved him he would ask me to be his wife?" asked the daughter sadly.

"O, Lily, Lily, you break my heart. There are fifty men in the world who would be glad to kneel at your feet. This stranger has infatuated you. What is he?"

"He is so good," murmured Lily.

"No better than other men."

"But I love only him!"

"He is poor, unknown, plain-looking——"

"No, for to me he has the grace of a king, the face of a god, the heart of an angel!"

"O, what madness!"

"He is my Christ! I would kneel at his feet and worship him all day long. A glance from his dark eyes would make me his slave. Mother, help me, or I die!" and she slipped to the floor, her arms outstretched, her face lying upon them.

The anxious mother knelt near her.

"Let us go away," she said.

"I shall stay here."

"But, Lily, you are so unhappy, and your grief drives me mad, for I cannot help you."

"Yes, you can!" and Lily moved her head impatiently away from the mother's caressing hands.

"How, my child?"

"Tell him I love him—tell him that I am dying—tell him that I shall go mad, or die if I do not become his wife."

"What you ask is impossible, and you know it. Can I go to him and say that?"

"Yes,—or let me go!"

"You are mad! Would you be so undignified?"

"Aye, for I would crawl to his feet and, laying my head in the dust, beseech him to have mercy upon me and let me become his slave only that I might be near him."

"What *shall* I do?" groaned Mrs. Wilde.

"Tell him."

"I cannot!"

"You must—or I shall!"

"Listen to me. Let us go to Charleston for a week. I

shall tell your uncle how you feel towards this man, and what your dowry will be. I shall ask him to hint to the young man as delicately as possible—perhaps a man can do it—that your hand and heart go with the dowry in this case.”

A radiant smile illumined Lily’s haggard face.

“Mother, are you deceiving me?”

“As God hears me, no. However humiliating it may be to me, sooner than see you so unhappy, I would go myself to this man and say it.”

“How good you are, mother!” Lily said, kissing her.

The next day found them *en route* for Charleston, where Lily, as a Washington belle, was fêted and flattered. When one wants only the moon, nothing else satisfies, and although she seemed the gayest of the gay, her heart was in a dingy lawyer’s office in Washington.

CHAPTER XXI.

"WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOR WOODED?"

ROBERT LANGSDALE sat in his office busily writing when Lily's uncle entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Warren," said Robert cordially.

"Morning."

"Have a seat."

"Thank you," responded Mr. Warren, uneasily fingering his hat.

Robert saw that the old man was ill at ease.

"I say, Robert, do you really make a good living out of this sort of thing?" glancing around the bare little room.

"I make a living," he answered simply.

"Why don't you get married?" abruptly asked his visitor, who congratulated himself that he was leading up to his subject with great *finesse*.

"Would that make living cheaper," asked Robert, as he sorted some papers, "when a man lives on almost nothing? I have not found any one who would accept me for my own value."

"I should think such a good-looking man would find no difficulty in making his way into some woman's heart."

"Clearly, I have not, and I have an intuition that I am not a favorite with the fair sex," said Robert grimly.

"Your own fault, then. I know one girl who likes you extremely well, in spite of your modesty," Mr. Warren replied eagerly.

"Pray, who can flatter me so highly?"

"My niece, Lily."

Robert bowed gravely.

"I thank both you and Miss Lily."

"Did you know she had gone to Charleston?"

Robert's agitation subsided. He thought of but one woman who could think favorably of him, and she was *not* Lily Wilde. What a fool he was to think this old man should know anything about Cora Allison.

"No, I did not know Miss Lily was out of the city. Will she be gone long?"

"That depends. What do you think of *her*?" he asked abruptly.

"I think Miss Lily very beautiful, very intelligent, and very charming."

"Yes, and she has everything to make a girl happy, but she is not. What would you think of a man who wished to marry her?"

"I should think he displayed extremely good taste."

Mr. Warren wiped his face furiously.

"How warm it is!"

Robert began to feel a bit out of patience with this man for taking his valuable time.

Mr. Warren drank a glass of water at one gulp, and sat down with a heavy thud.

"Robert," he said, "tell me frankly, are you entangled with any woman so that marriage with another would be out of the question?"

The red blood rushed to the very tips of Robert's ears, but before he could answer the old man hastily resumed:

"I do not mean to be impertinent. I am in earnest, and I ask it for your own good, I hope."

"Well, sir, if you mean have I ever been married, or am I engaged to be, I can tell you frankly, no. I am free from all entanglements."

Poor Mr. Warren's face cleared.

"My niece gets five hundred thousand dollars on her bridal day. Do you think you could like her well enough to ask *her* to be your wife?"

Robert grasped the arms of his chair. In all the world there was only one woman he ever wished to call his wife, but she could never be his. Was this old man tempting him?

Mr. Warren rubbed his bald head. He was greatly embarrassed, but was using desperate efforts to hide it.

"Confound the women!" he mentally ejaculated.
"They are at the bottom of all disagreeable business!"

Robert steadied his voice to reply.

"Mr. Warren, I am at a loss to understand your meaning."

Irritated by the situation, the old man blurted out angrily:

"Confound it, man, I thought I spoke plainly enough for you to understand the confoundedly disagreeable errand I came on to-day. In a few words, then, my fool niece is madly in love with you, and her fool mother asked me to find out your sentiments. There now, is that plain enough?" shouted the old gentleman, now fairly enraged.

Robert was speechless with astonishment.

Mr. Warren, thoroughly aroused, intended to empty the vials of his wrath.

"The old fool took the young one to Charleston to leave a clear track for me! I've made a mess of it, I see, and wish I were out of it."

Robert could not repress a smile, as he said to the old man:

"Pray be composed, Mr. Warren, and let us talk reasonably and quietly. Have I, by my attentions, compromised the young lady?"

"Great Scott, no," the old gentleman replied warmly, "but the women! When they love, it is by the whole-sale! Here's this girl, swears she will die if you will not marry her, and I come to you in all good faith and ask if there is any obstacle in the way, and by granny! I've put my foot in it!"

Robert rose and paced up and down the room.

"Let me think!" he muttered.

Mr. Warren leaned back and fanned his heated face, breathing like a hippopotamus when he comes up from his watery bed.

Robert said at last:

"Perhaps I do not love Miss Lily as ardently as I should, to ask her to be my wife——"

"O, she'll do all the loving! Why, by granny! man,

her mother had to take her away to keep her from telling everybody in town how she loved you! They gave me a week's grace, and if I can't answer 'em some way, they'll go for me, tooth and nail!"

Robert sat down and leaned his face in his hands. He was a man of honor and chivalric nature. Lily's money would be no inducement to him, but Lily suffering for his sake gave the situation another aspect. He believed every word the old man said. He had no right to think that Cora had suffered, would suffer, for his sake, for she was out of his life—she belonged to another, and to the Past! Her image was always with him, but she must be as dead to him as if she were under the sod.

But this other woman—this living woman? Would she suffer as he had done? She was not repulsive to him, but the idea of marrying her was thrust on him so suddenly, it set his brain in a whirl.

"Mr. Warren," he said, "if what you say is true—if Miss Lily—ah—yes—well, there is no reason why I should not ask her to be my wife, except—her money."

"Money? Confound it, man, you'll find that that is the one good thing in the bargain. Forget your pride, or I'll see that all the money is settled on her, and you can still go on 'earning your living,' ha! ha!"

"Yes, I should like that. That is what I should do, no matter who or when I marry."

Mr. Warren nodded his head.

"Good boy!"

"I'll see Miss Lily when she returns," Robert concluded.

Mr. Warren jumped up and seized his hat exultantly.

"If ever I get into such a scrape again, by granny! I hope they'll put me in a lunatic asylum!" he cried, and as he passed out slammed the door.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AN HOUR BEFORE THE WORSHIPPED SUN."

ROBERT sat in the library of Mrs. Wilde's large house.

He had not waited long before the slight rustle of skirts heralded Lily's coming.

She advanced, her clasped hands held out.

He thought she seemed ill; she looked worn and haggard. Her beautiful gray eyes were encircled by deep rings and a crimson spot flamed on each cheek.

Before he could speak, she sank at his feet, and brokenly said:

"I adore you—I worship you—I would give my life for you!"

"Lily!"

Shocked and startled, he stooped, put his arm about her, and drew her to her feet.

She leaned against his breast and clung to him passionately. He had come to ask this woman, quietly and calmly, to be his wife!

How was he to talk quietly and sensibly to this girl?

"Lily——" he faltered.

"Yes!" she answered in a low, vibrating voice, laying her head near his bounding heart.

"You will marry me?"

"Now!"

"You love me?"

"I worship thee, my beloved!"

He released her clinging fingers, closing his own over them.

"You—you are fearfully agitated," he muttered. "Let us sit down."

He felt himself swept off his feet.

They sat down, and his arm naturally slipped about her waist.

"Sweetheart!"

"You are the wine of my life! O, Robert, I have almost *died* to see you!"

Grief and anguish had set their seal on her lovely features, and seeing these, his great heart beat in sympathy.

"Do you love me so well, poor girl?"

"'When I love thee not, chaos has come.' Robert, how can I tell you how I have longed for you? How many wretched days and nights I have passed for your dear sake? How wildly and madly I have prayed to see you! To hear your voice—to look into your eyes—to feel the clasp of your hand! O, I never hoped that you would hold me to your heart as you have and to kiss me—I never dared hope you would ask me to be your wife! You seemed so far away—so set apart from me!"

Her head was lying on his shoulder now, her eyes were closed, and the tears were falling on her pale cheeks. He wiped them away as tenderly as if she were a weeping child. His own heart was aching, even while he kissed her.

"Dear, do you think you can be happy with me?" he asked.

"Happy! I shall die if you leave me!" and a shudder shook her from head to foot.

"I shall wish to be married very soon," he said, passing his hand over her shining hair. "When shall it be?"

She looked at him wistfully.

"Do you wish it to be soon?"

"Very soon."

Then a swift blush dyed her face, and turning her head, she hid it on his breast.

"I wish I were your wife now!"

He held her close.

Was he weak to marry this girl because of her unspeakable love for him? How his heart yearned over her! How her suffering appealed to him! How her weakness touched his manliness!

"Dear—my little sweetheart," he said over the top of her head, "I wish with all my heart you were. Why, should we wait?"

She lifted her head, putting both arms about his neck, and said:

"Robert, if I can only make you happy!"

"You can."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Language fails to express my love for you," she said simply.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WOMAN'S DESPAIR.

WASHINGTON society was startled when the newspapers announced that Lily Wilde had become the wife of Robert Langsdale, barrister, one week after her return from Charleston.

Robert insisted that Lily's money should be settled only upon her. "I may some day beg or borrow from my wife, but I shall not be a legalized pensioner of her bounty," he declared.

"Little girl," he said, "they have angered me by bringing you into this discussion. I promise you if I ever have to beg or borrow, it will be from you, but I think God endowed me with sufficient brains to earn my food and clothes, and what else does even the richest man have?" and he kissed her pouting lips until she smiled again.

Robert asked a friend to send a paper to Tresham Willard.

It was done.

Across the ocean, in other lands, with a beautiful woman who loved him passionately, how could he fail to be happy—for a time?

But ah, the woman left behind!

"Poor Cora! How will she bear it!"

This had been Tresham's thought when he gave her the paper to read.

"Mahse Tresh, kin I see yur a minute, sah?"

"Yes."

But before leaving her, Tresham kissed Cora and said:

"Little sister, do not let it trouble you."

Cora's heart—poor heart, that had seen so little joy!—began to quake.

Tresham looked after her a moment as she went down the long hall. He had loved no other women but his mother and sister, and his sole thought was now of her. He regretted bitterly that he could not spare her this blow.

Cora sat in a low chair near the open window in her room and spread the paper on her knees, and she never forgot the fragrance of the yellow jessamine that bloomed near. It always spoke to her of that day.

"Whatever it is, God will give me strength," but the paper rustled as her nervous hands grasped it, and she read—

"That beautiful and wealthy society queen, Miss Lily Wilde, astonished her friends by her sudden marriage to-day, at Grace Church, to Mr. Robert Langsdale, a promising young barrister, formerly of Alabama, now of Washington. It was a small wedding, and they are off for Europe. Mr. Langsdale is to be congratulated on securing one of the loveliest, wittiest and most brilliant women of Washington."

The paper fluttered from her fingers and Cora slipped to the floor, silent and motionless.

Words cannot describe the loneliness that crept into her soul.

"He is lost to me forever! I *know* he loved me—I *know* he has given his name to this woman for some other reason than love for her. O, my beloved, how could you perjure your soul? I would have died to save you! I would have given my heart's blood drop by drop, to make you happy! And you knew it! Why have you done this? Why did you make me love you, and then go away without one word, leaving me only despair?"

These were some of the mad, tumultuous thoughts that surged through her brain as she looked at the view from her window, which had always been so attractive to her. But she never saw it again without a clutch at her heart.

"Cora!" called Tresham.

She did not move.

He touched the cold, rigid hand.

"Sister, is it so hard to bear?"

"It is death," she muttered as if to herself.

"Your head aches, I know, and you will feel better when Celeste has bathed it."

"Yes," she said.

He stroked her hair silently a few moments.

He could not blame Robert, as he judged no man without knowing the motive for doing certain deeds. He knew that his sister was a Christian, and would find hope and strength in the strong arm of prayer. Her sufferings were as great as Lily Wilde's, but Lily was without hope or faith in anything except her love for Robert Langsdale.

"Cora, it's about time for us to run away again, isn't it? It is a year since we came from California. What do you say to a trip to Paris?"

"My dear brother, noblest and best!" murmured Cora gratefully.

She understood why he suggested this.

"How long will it take you to get ready?"

"One hour."

He laughed.

"That is right. But, seriously, can you leave in a day or two?"

"O, yes."

"Well, then, I'll see Mack and put everything in his hands at once. Do you feel better?" he asked, kissing her pale cheek.

A deep, shuddering sigh ran through her.

"I am well now," she said.

The next day saw the two travelers on their way—the house closed, and careful Mack in melancholy possession.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LET ME WRING YOUR HEART."

ROBERT and Lily, after traveling two months, settled in Paris.

"Robert, I have half a mind to write to mama and beg her to come over. I know she misses me, for we have never been separated before."

"Do," said Robert, who was busily sorting his correspondence.

"What is this?" she asked, putting her white fingers on a neatly tied package on his desk.

"O, that is something that belonged to me before I was happy enough to know you," he said carelessly.

He recognized the package, and his fingers tingled to get it out of her grasp, but he had long since learned that his wife was a jealous woman, and any sign of uneasiness on his part would arouse her at once.

"May I open it?" she asked coaxingly.

"Why, certainly, if you wish," he readily replied.

He tried to steady his voice and look unconscious as she untied the pink cord which bound the letters and photograph of his lost love.

He watched Lily closely.

Her lips were compressed, her eyes contracted, and all the color in her face burned in two brilliant spots on her cheeks.

"Robert, who is this woman?"

"She is a lady I once knew in Alabama—a married lady, but——"

"*You loved this woman!*" she said in a low voice.

The shot went home. He turned white to the lips, but controlled his emotion and answered gently: "Lily, I tell you she is married."

"And are those her letters?" she angrily cried.

He stopped to clear his throat, then went on: "You may read them, if you like."

Lily had already glanced at several, and found them merely friendly, commonplace missives.

"Cora! Cora!" Lily repeated, gazing more intently at the picture of a beautiful woman.

"If she ever crosses my path, I'll kill her!" shrieked Lily suddenly.

Robert rose, and gazed steadily into her flaming eyes.

"Lily!" he said reproachfully.

In a moment she was sobbing on his breast.

"Forgive me, forgive me, dear love!"

He put his hands over his eyes, and said gently:

"You have wounded me deeply, dear."

"I am so sorry!"

"Not by your outburst of temper, but by your *suspicion of me*."

"Forgive me! Forgive me!"

Thus she sobbed, holding him tightly.

"Now, if you are quite composed, we will go back to the picture and the letters," he said, after a time. "I valued them because she was a very dear friend, but to-day I shall give them into your keeping to do with them as you wish."

She dashed them frenziedly across the room. He sat down at his desk, but his hands shook and his lips were still white.

She fell on her knees at his feet.

"Robert, oh, my love, do not look at me so coldly! You *kill* me with your anger! Pardon, pardon! You are my lord and master! Do with me as you will!"

"Then bring me the letters and picture."

Like a punished child, with streaming eyes and sobbing breath, she obeyed him.

He replaced them in his desk, and drew her close to his aching heart.

"May I look at the picture again, Robert?"

"If you will not harm it."

"I promise."

He put it in her hand.

She looked at it steadily a moment, then said:

"Robert, I know this woman."

He felt his heart beating fast.

"It is Mrs. Allison, of Alabama," she said slowly.

Then indeed he started.

"How—how do you know?"

"I met her several seasons at different summer resorts. Her husband is dead."

"No," he forced himself to say.

"Yes, Guy Allison was related to my uncle, and I remember well when he died."

"The man is not dead."

She looked at him closely.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true. Guy Allison lives, but he is in an insane asylum."

"I could almost laugh. How long have you known Cora Allison?"

"About three years, I think."

"I thought you said she was an old friend." A sneer trembled on her beautiful lips. "Did she tell you her husband was alive?"

He looked bewildered for a moment.

"No, I remember distinctly that she told me she was a widow."

"Then who told you that Guy was not dead?"

"A friend."

"Another woman friend?"

"No, two men who had known her family a great many years."

"Then they lied," she said coolly.

He stood up.

"Have you any letters to mail?"

"Not just now."

"Good-by," and he went out hurriedly.

A cruel laugh lurked in her eyes as she watched him.

"I have found out his secret," and turning to the letters, she read them deliberately, one by one, tied them neatly together and placed them in his desk, then left

the room, returning presently with a pretty gold and blue frame. She inserted Cora's picture in this, and standing it on the desk, looked at it with a satisfied air.

"It will hurt him every time he looks at it, and he will not dare take it down, because he will know that *I* put it there," and she laughed mirthlessly.

Fortunately, good men do not know how much they are at the mercy of women, good or bad.

How jealous people suffer, no one but the victims know. Lily certainly loved her husband, but it was agony for her to think any one had won his heart. Therefore she hated this unsuspecting woman, and would make her feel it—if she ever met her.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE PICTURE GALLERY.

TRESHAM and Cora were after this were in a famous picture gallery in Marie Antoinette's loved city, when suddenly Tresham felt his arm clutched tightly, and turning, he saw his wife's white, terror-stricken face.

"Cora! What is it?"

"O, a chair—quick!" she breathed.

Luckily a seat was near.

"I am not going to faint," she smiled.

"But you look so ill. Stay here and I will get you a glass of water."

"No, no, do not leave me, for I am already better."

"What frightened you?" he asked, gravely.

"Who—who is that coming this way?" she asked, struggling hard to get the words out smoothly, but her tongue seemed thick.

He looked in the direction her eyes pointed, and saw two women and a man approaching.

He smothered an exclamation.

"Can't we get away?" murmured Cora.

Tresham sat down by her.

"We will not try. Be brave and show him you do not care."

She lowered her head a moment, then raised it defiantly.

The elder lady came first, looked steadily into Cora's face, then exclaimed:

"I thought I could not be mistaken," and she stretched out both hands.

"Mrs.——" Cora murmured, rising, and trying hard to remember the name, for certainly the face was familiar.

"Yes, Mrs. Wilde," prompted the other.

"Forgive me—Mrs. Wilde."

"And this——"

"Is my brother, Tresham Willard—Mrs. Wilde."

Tresham bowed with the grace of a courtier, while Mrs. Wilde laughed.

"How ridiculous I am! I thought it was your husband."

"My husband is dead," said Cora simply.

"Yes, yes, of course—forgive me," the shocked lady replied. "I knew poor Guy was dead—certainly."

Tresham was the only one who could smile at the thought of Cora being married a second time.

Mrs. Wilde called,—

"Lily!" to the tall, graceful woman who stood near, apparently absorbed in a picture.

The young lady turned her head quickly. She had not noticed the two people with whom her mother was conversing.

"Yes?" she said.

"This is Cora Allison," her mother explained.

"O, is it?"

Cora looked up into Robert Langsdale's dark eyes. They seemed to burn her soul.

How easily we readjust our masks—we who pose before the world!

Lily felt her husband's arm tremble, when her mother pronounced this golden-haired beauty's name. He held out a steady hand, and said, clearly:

"How glad I am to see you, Mrs. Allison."

"Thank you," she answered quietly.

She sat down again.

"How goes it, Tresham, old man?" he said next, turning to Tresham, who gravely shook hands.

"My wife," said Langsdale.

Lily gave Tresham a smile and her white hand.

"We did not know you had left Washington," Tresham felt constrained to say.

"O, we came away immediately after our marriage," Lily exclaimed brightly.

"It seems she tired of me very quickly, for she sent for her mother as soon as we arrived here," and Robert tried to laugh easily.

"Yes, he has already learned to dread his mother-in-law," Mrs. Wilde said, laughing in her turn.

"Now, mother," accusingly.

"How long have you been here?" asked Lily of Cora, who raised her eyes as she answered,

"Not long—a few days."

"How strange we should meet in Paris."

"Yes."

"When did you leave America?" she next asked, turning to Tresham.

"Some months ago," he answered readily.

"Mrs. Allison, my husband has your picture. It is very lovely, and I have framed it so we can both feast our eyes on its beauty."

"You are very good—you quite flatter me," Cora murmured, feeling annoyed that she could not keep the color out of her face. Her eyes looked appealingly at Tresham, then irresistibly they sought Robert. How sad and worn he looked. He must have suffered. Was he happy now?

Cora's thoughts were brought back by Lily's voice.

"Will you dine with us to-day, Mrs. Allison?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Langsdale, Tresham makes our engagements, and I do not know what he has planned for the day."

"I will ask him," said Lily, turning away.

Why do jealous people love self-torture? Lily would rather strangle Cora than kiss her, but she also wished to see her husband and this woman suffer—as she hoped they would.

Mrs. Wilde said:

"You are not strong, then?"

"Usually, yes, but Tresham thought I was not as well as I should be this summer. We are the only ones left now," Cora answered, a little sadly.

Mentally she was praying that Tresham would decline

Lily's invitation. Evidently he had, for Lily came back with a vexed look.

"Your brother is certainly an exasperating man. How do you live with such a bear?"

Cora laughed a little.

"I find him a very lovable Bruin."

Lily tossed her head.

"You know then that you leave Paris to-night?"

"No, I did not, but I am not surprised, for he gave me only one night to prepare for this trip."

She could answer more readily since she knew the same city would not hold her and these people many hours longer.

Tresham came up.

"Cora, as we leave to-night, I know there will be a little packing to do yet, and that is a slow process with most women."

"Yes, I wish we could go about with one portmanteau, as the men do."

"I hope, since you leave so soon, you will allow us to call this evening."

It was Robert who spoke as his great, melancholy eyes devoured Cora's pale face hungrily, and noted each line which pain had drawn.

Cora answered gently:

"I'm afraid, Mr. Langsdale, that I shall be too busy to see any one between now and train time."

He understood, and stepped aside with a bow, not daring to look at her.

"We are sure to meet elsewhere," Tresham said cheerfully, looking back as they moved away.

"I hope not—I hope never again to see her face," Lily passionately exclaimed.

"Let us go home," said Robert, clasping her shaking hand firmly, and drawing it through his arm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"SHE WAS LIKE THE ROSE."

A SLENDER, brown-haired, brown-eyed girl, with crimson cheeks and lips, a frown upon her pretty face, stood near a dappled gray pony. Her hat was pushed back from her face, she held her skirt with one hand, while with the other she beat the air with her whip.

"Papa, I shall be so disappointed if you do not let me go, and I do *not* think it will rain, this morning."

It was at a Southern summer resort. A gentleman with gray hair stood upon the steps, looking first at the sky, then at the wilful pouting girl on the graveled walk below.

"If you should be in one of these mountain storms, you'd never wish to risk another," the old gentleman admonished.

"O, dear, I wish I were a man!"

"Why?"

"Then I could do as I pleased. I would jump on Humbug and gallop down that road as hard as he could go!"

"Go, then, Humbugs both," he said playfully.

With a saucy laugh, Lucile Haseby sprang from the ground to the horse's back, and dashed away.

"Some day she'll break her neck—I wish she had a mother," he said, unconsciously uttering the plaint aloud.

"Easiest thing in the world—marry again," counseled a young man who was leaning against a pillar, looking after Lucile with a speculative eye.

"But where's the woman?" asked Colonel Haseby.

"She'll be only too easy to find," answered the fellow languidly.

"Perhaps I am not so easily pleased."

"I see two widows!" said the other.

"Where?"

"In my mind's eye."

"Is it necessary that I marry a widow?"

"No, but it is decreed by the Fates, or Furies, *that you will!*"

"But where is she?"

"Coming straight after you! She'll be *here* in a few days. She is rich, fair, fat, but more than forty."

"Who is she?" asked the Colonel.

"Ah, you sly old dog, do you think I will tell? Perhaps I shall forestall you myself."

"With a woman more than forty?"

"What cavalcade is that?" the other interrupted suddenly.

"A carriage from the dépôt and Lucile's pony behind it, riderless!" and the agitated father hurried up the street only to meet Lucile's merry gipsy face looking out of the carriage window.

"No damage done, papa," she called.

The carriage stopped.

"Humbug's saddle girth broke. I only slipped off—not hard. These kind people were coming up the hill, and rescued me. *Voilà!*" with a wave of her hand as if the accident were a thing of no moment.

"I thank you a thousand times," cried the Colonel with gratitude, grasping the *man's* hand, who now stepped out.

"The service was very slight," he laughed, putting out his hand to Lucile, who scrambled out like a monkey, followed by a most beautiful golden-haired woman.

"By Jove! man, you are certainly a Willard!"

"I am, sir," answered Tresham surprisedly, raising his hat.

"I knew it! Why, boy, your father was my dearest friend. I—I saw him die!" shaking Tresham's hand over and over.

"And this——"

"Is my sister, Mrs. Allison."

Cora bowed. The old gentleman seemed overpowered by her beauty.

"Colonel Haseby, at your service, madam."

"I am very glad to meet a friend of my father," she said with feeling, holding out her hand, which the Colonel took and bowed reverently over.

Lucile entered the hotel with her rescuers. The Colonel stared in admiration at Cora's vanishing form.

The slim bystander was convulsed at the Colonel's expression as he asked:

"And is *that* the one? Is *she* a widow?"

"She is, but she is *not* the one for you," and he laughed uncontrollably at the Colonel's crestfallen look.

"That is *my* widow. Yours is yet to come."

"You mean that you're engaged to her."

"No, Colonel, but I hope to be."

The Colonel made a grimace. "She did not recognize you as she passed by."

"I did not want her to. She knows me, and I know her, but I turned aside purposely."

And Mr. Stenson walked away.

The Colonel looked after him meditatively.

"The man is a liar!" he said mentally.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"A GOODLY APPLE ROTTEN AT THE CORE."

"LILY, I wish you would not, for I do not think it prudent to leave Irene in the care of an illiterate negro when she is so ill."

Lily Langsdale was dressed for a ball. She turned her lace-draped shoulder pettishly away from her husband, who stood near, pale and troubled.

"I wish, Robert, that you would not be so absurd. I shall not stop at home to-night. I am invited expressly to meet the Japanese Embassy and I would not miss it for anything. Irene is teething—that is all, and Sarah is the best of nurses."

"Have you seen Irene in the last hour?"

"No, I have been dressing and have had no time."

Robert sighed deeply, and said earnestly:

"You are quite decided on going, then?"

"I am."

"I hope you will not regret it," he said quietly.

This calm demeanor cost him an effort—but he had long ago realized the folly of meeting Lily's temper with answering sparks.

"You go, of course?" she asked carelessly, picking up her fan and gloves.

He looked sternly at his beautiful wife as she stood before him glowing with youth and loveliness.

"No, I cannot leave our sick child alone."

Her scarlet lip curled.

"What sentimental nonsense, Robert. If you stay, I shall not," and she looked coldly at his white face and sorrowful eyes.

He only said:

"The night is cold, wrap yourself up warmly."

"I can take care of myself," she answered pettishly, disappointed that he made no further protest.

Her maid carefully arranged her opera coat.

"Louise, your master does not go out to-night," throwing him a mocking glance—"get your wraps. You accompany me. Good-by, Robert. Hope I'll find you in a good humor when I return. Sorry your friend Cora is not in Washington this winter. Perhaps you would find her congenial company to-night," and with a cruel laugh Lily swept out of the room, leaving behind her a cloud of perfume which so many women delight in.

Robert sat down dejectedly. They had been married only two years, and this was all that her passionate love had meant. What a fool he had been! Why had he not investigated more closely those reports of Stenson's? Why had he let his delicacy overcome his love for Cora? Why had he not sifted the whole matter to the bottom? He, a lawyer!

How long he sat there, brooding over the past, he never knew, for he was only roused by a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said.

"O, Mahse Bob, whar Miss Lily?" and Sarah, the faithful old negro nurse, stood by him.

He roused himself.

"She—she is not here."

"Not heah? O, my Gawd, an' dey baby dyin'!"

He started to his feet. "What is that you say?"

"Dey truf, Mahse Bob. O, whar Miss Lily?"

"She has gone to a ball."

"O, fur dey Lawd's sake, sen' fur her!"

"Come!"

Passing her swiftly, he went up to the nursery. He bent over the carved crib where the infant lay. Her cheeks were burning, her eyes half closed in a rigid stare.

"Sarah, tell Phonse to go for Dr. Milledge."

"O, honey. I done sent long 'go, 'fore I went fur you an' Miss Lily. O, Mahse Bob, please, sah, sen' fur Miss Lily!"

He looked at his watch.

"It is of no use. She must be on her way home by now—it is past time. Besides, she knew Irene was very ill before she went," and his lips set sternly.

"But, O, Mahse Bob, dey baby dyin'!" old Sarah went on. "O, I nursed Miss Lily w'en she a baby, an' I knows dey chile! O, dis'll kill Miss Lily."

"Hush!" he said, deeply moved by the faithful servant's grief. "Go, then, and tell one of the boys to hurry the carriage home if they can find it."

He knelt, holding the little hand and watching the red fast fading from the tiny cheeks of his first-born. Sarah knelt on the other side.

Dr. Milledge came in. He felt the feeble, fluttering pulse.

"No, she cannot recover. This is death," he answered Robert's questioning gaze, and even while he spoke, the baby lay in the great hush that will come to us all as we enter the other world; that world unknown, which holds no terrors for such as this infant.

Robert hastily went to his wife's room. It was there he would meet her. Scarcely had he entered, when the door opened and she, smiling and radiant, came in.

He knew that the messenger had not met her.

"Well, I went and came back, and the skies have not fallen," she laughed, jeering at him with her beautiful eyes.

He moved slightly.

"Sit down, Lily. Are you not cold?" he asked.

She gazed curiously at his set face.

"Am I in for a lecture?" she said, cosily seating herself on an ottoman and stretching her feet over the hearth.

"Your feet are damp?"

"Somewhat," and she shivered a little. "Louise is not as good a guardian as you," and she gave one of her mirthless laughs.

He looked at her in silence.

Poor creature!

Would she always be a thing of trifles?

Lily yawned.

"If you don't mind, Robert, I'll go to bed."

"Come with me."

She looked up, startled at his tone.

"Where? But first, how is Irene?"

"She is well," he answered slowly, wrapping a warm shawl about Lily's neck and arms.

"I knew she was not so ill as you would have me believe. Heigh-ho! I enjoyed myself immensely," she chattered on, as she mounted the stairs to the nursery, he close to her side. They entered, and Lily walked to the child's bed.

What is this?

"My God! My God! my baby is dead, and you told me she was well!" she screamed, throwing herself at the foot of the crib where Irene lay, beautiful as a waxen image in the hands of that sculptor—death.

Robert lifted the weeping woman and held her to his aching heart.

"O, you are cruel! Why did you let me go away from her? Why did you not send for me?"

"She has been dead but a half hour. We sent a messenger, but you must have left long before he got there. Come, now."

Lily would not be taken away. She moaned and cried bitterly, heaping reproaches on all about her.

Old Sarah knelt at her feet, sobbing as unrestrainedly as her mistress. "O, honey, chile, doan' tek on so! She gone to Jesus now, an' you see her agin some day. O, she not lost, but jest gone before!"

Tenderly Robert urged the stricken woman from the room.

All night she lay near his suffering, lonely heart, reproaching herself, reproaching him, and begging for death herself as God's greatest boon to so miserable a woman as she. Robert prayed for and with her, but Lily Langsdale was a Godless woman, and prayer brought no comfort to her harrowed soul.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ODDS AND ENDS.

WE return to the party we left at the Springs.

Mr. Stenson renewed his violent love-making to Cora, but she persistently refused his proffered hand and heart.

Tresham developed a most ardent admiration for Lucile Haseby. This afternoon they are walking by the beautiful springs that make this resort so famous.

Lucile is seventeen, and fresh from school, and very flirtatious.

She knows precisely how to manage this handsome, devoted man who walks contentedly at her side.

"Yes," she chatters, "I think it a shame that papa has kept me in school *so long*. Papa would not let me have a governess and study at home—although I begged and pleaded not to be sent away. Was he not hard-hearted?" she asked, glancing coquettishly from under her wide hat.

"Very. I do not see how he could resist *you*," and Tresham pressed the little hand lying so confidently on his arm.

Was Tresham flirting, too? Ah, no, poor fellow! *He* is hopelessly in love and means every pretty compliment he pays this gorgeous butterfly.

"My mama died when I was an infant. O, I have been so afraid lest papa should take it into his silly old head to marry again!" she sighed, as they walked down a rocky little path.

"I should think you would like to have a mother—one to whom you could go in time of perplexity—I suppose you have such times?"

She tossed her head. "Not often. I see clearly through everything, and I never find any problem too knotty for me to solve."

"You see through me?"

"I do!" nodding her head vigorously.

"Will you tell me what your lenses have discovered?" Tresham bent his tall head to gaze at the piquant little face.

She blushed. "Some day—I will."

"Why not to-day?"

"Because——" then dropping his arm, she walked swiftly away from him.

He was so surprised—poor greenhorn—he did not think to follow her. Whereat she was mightily wroth.

"What does she mean?" he puzzled.

However, the silliest girl is a match for the wisest man when he loves her.

Tresham walked perplexedly along, vainly trying to find a reason for her leaving him so abruptly.

Lucile met him that night as merrily, unconsciously and unconcernedly as if she had not caused him one of the unhappiest afternoons he had ever known—and she knew it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW."

"WELL, Colonel Haseby, *the* widow arrives to-day."

This was Mr. Stenson's greeting to Colonel Haseby as he joined him in an afternoon smoke under a shady tree.

"I thought she was already here," answered the Colonel, leaning back in his wicker chair. Stenson stared at his blissful companion.

"To whom do you refer?"

"Mrs. Allison."

Stenson looked annoyed.

"Do you call *her* 'fair, fat and forty'?" he asked, savagely biting his cigar.

"Certainly not, but you never said she was forty," answered the Colonel, looking up intently at rings of smoke.

"Mrs. Allison is *not* forty, but she is fair."

"Mrs. Allison is as fair and fresh as a girl of sixteen, and prettier now than she ever *was*. Mrs. Wilde, of Washington, arrives to-day," he ended.

Colonel Haseby cocked up one eye as you have seen a merry, saucy robin do, then laughed good-humoredly.

"And she is fair, fat——"

"But not forty—a little beyond it, in fact."

"Lucile is a termagant. The widow—has she many children?"

"One."

"Boy or girl?"

"A married daughter."

"O-h-h, a houseful of grandchildren, then."

"Not even that. Lily Wilde is married—I forget to whom—and last winter lost her only child."

Why did the man lie? He well knew the name of Lily Wilde's husband, but some men are given to useless lying.

"They are coming for Miss Lily's health. Her lungs are affected."

"Poor woman!"

Mr. Stenson's announcement was fulfilled by the arrival of the expected guests that afternoon, and as Fate would have it, they had selected the same hotel that housed our other party.

Cora had not seen Robert Langsdale since leaving Paris, and so was wholly unprepared to see at dinner Mrs. Wilde, Lily and Robert.

What a ghastly change there was in the once plump and brilliant Lily! Her eyes were sunken and preternaturally large and bright—her cheeks were thin and pallid, except two crimson spots which glowed like blood on a lily's petal.

Cora grasped her chair. As she saw Robert's eyes fixed on her, she smiled, bowed to each mechanically and sank into her chair.

Had her life depended on it, she could not have walked across that room.

Robert rose and came over to her. "What a great and unexpected pleasure," he said, fervently grasping the hand she timidly held out to him.

"You are very kind," she murmured, letting her eyes rove slowly over his features. She did not want to look at him, but—ah, a woman's will is weak when guided by her heart! How wan and wasted he looked—almost as thin as Lily, only there was no danger signal fluttering in his cheeks.

"Will you go over to see Lily now?" he asked.

"Won't you say to your wife and Mrs. Wilde that I will call after dinner? I am kept here by Tresham's absence. I always remain at the table for him. For some reason, he is late to-night."

If she had only known what was keeping him! She dared not trust herself with them without a little premeditation, so Robert returned to his dinner.

"What did you say to Cora Allison?" Lily demanded fretfully.

"Simply asked her to come over to our table."

"And she refused?"

"She is waiting for Tresham. She will call on you after dinner."

"Well, we will go now."

He gave her his arm, arranged a fluffy little scarf about her neck, and they left the dining-room.

They reached their sitting-room, and Lily reclined on a sofa. Suddenly she put out her arms and clasped him convulsively.

"I suffer so! I suffer so!" she moaned.

He put his arms about the shaking form and pressed her head to his breast. "My poor wife!" he soothed, "you will be better soon."

"My heart! my heart!" she sobbed, "and I see it all so clearly. I shall leave you behind, and then you will marry her!"

"Lily! Lily!" he expostulated, "do not distress yourself unnecessarily. You are morbid. If you wish, we will go away to-morrow. I cannot bear to see you so unhappy."

"You cannot help it! O, how often I have said I would give my life for you—to make you happy—but now that the sacrifice is demanded, it is more than I can bear!"

He soothed her fearful agitation as best he could.

"It is best so, best so!" she murmured at last. "You will be happy with her, and I should be content. But, dear, how can I give you up?"

"My dear wife, do not weep. There are years of life before you, I hope, but there is a life beyond where we shall meet again."

"No, I do not know that," moving restlessly on his breast. "If I could only believe that—if I could have your hope—your faith—it would be easier to die! But I shall die and leave you to *her*!" she wailed.

"Mother," he called, as Mrs. Wilde entered the room, "do what you can for Lily. I shall return presently," and he laid the now tearless Lily back on her cushions, and with a kiss, left the room.

Mrs. Wilde bent over her.

"My love, are you ill?"

"Ill unto death," muttered Lily with a sigh.

"Shall I get a new magazine and read to you?" asked Mrs. Wilde, seeing that Lily's present attack was principally mental.

"What good will it do? My own life has been such a terrible tragedy of love and hate, what do I care for the weakly pictured anguish of magazine heroines? I cry for bread, and you and Robert give me stones! You think me a child or a fool!"

After this outburst she lay quiet.

Mrs. Wilde felt as helpless as Robert, and experienced a distinct sense of relief when she answered a gentle knock at the door.

It was Cora.

CHAPTER XXX.

"FAIR, FAT AND FORTY."

Mrs. WILDE shook hands cordially with Cora.

"This is a pleasure we did not expect when we came."

She led her to Lily's couch. Cora was sad, as she viewed the swift ravages disease had made upon Lily's beautiful face.

She pressed Lily's hand sympathetically, but the latter looked at her coldly.

"She is glad I am dying," thought the unhappy girl.

"And how did you find out this delightful resort?" Cora was asking.

Lily turned her head uneasily, then sat upright. "They know I am dying, but they came here to save my precious life," she said bitterly. "I believe a Mr. Stenson recommended the place to Robert."

Her mother was shocked at Lily's words.

"O, daughter!" she remonstrated.

"It is true, and then Cora Allison and——" but the poor, tortured soul sank back on her pillows, biting her lips to restrain the words she knew would drive Cora from her side forever.

"I hope you will soon get strong," Cora's sweet voice soothingly replied.

"There is no hope—now—they know it and so do I!"

She put her hands to her eyes, and Cora saw the tears slipping through the slim interlaced fingers.

"Is the place very gay?" asked Mrs. Wilde, to change the subject.

"Not very—quite like other places of its character. I notice that your rooms are in the wing opposite the ball-room."

"Do you dance?" and Mrs. Wilde elevated her brows inquiringly.

"Not often. I was never very fond of it, and you know my early girlhood was given over to other exercises."

Lily removed her damp fingers, and looked interestedly at Cora's animated face.

"What exercise?"

Cora laughed right merrily.

"Cooking, scouring, milking, washing, etc., etc."

Lily sat up and gazed at her with a surprised air.

"Why did you do that? You are wealthy."

"Now—yes. But my father and elder brother were killed in Virginia during the war, and mama, Tresham and I were very poor—until I married," she answered simply.

"The war crippled us all," Mrs. Wilde said affably. Her husband had invested his money in foreign countries, so his fortune was very little affected by the war, which wrecked almost every man, woman and child left in the South.

Robert opened the door and came in with Tresham and Colonel Haseby.

The Colonel sat by Mrs. Wilde; after being presented to Lily, Tresham seated himself by the latter's sofa, and this naturally left Robert to Cora.

Time and change are wonderful medicines, and Cora knew now that she could look at him without pain.

"You have not changed," he said.

"I'm sorry I cannot say the same of you," she answered.

Unconsciously he sighed, then glancing over to Colonel Haseby and Mrs. Wilde, a faint smile played round his mouth, and he said:

"You had best lock away your heart, Miss Cora, for yonder gay Lochinvar is in quest of one."

The old name seemed to fall readily from his lips, and Cora smiled amusedly in response.

"Is he so easily pleased?"

"He has not been, but—what do you think of that?"

Colonel Haseby was leaning over his chair, talking rapidly and gazing squarely and fearlessly into Mrs.

Wilde's face, while Mrs. Wilde blushed consciously, and hanging her head, played nervously with her fan.

"I think he is very much in earnest," Cora announced after a survey of the interested parties.

"A widower, when in search of a wife, loses no time in beating about the bush. They tell me he has a very pretty daughter."

"Yes, quite so, and very lovable, too."

"Is that Tresham's opinion of her?"

"I think it is," and she laughed.

Tresham, who had been talking to Lily, rose and came over to them. "Your wife wants to know if you think it will be imprudent for her to drive out this evening, Robert?"

"Not at all, and if she wishes she shall go," and with a slight bow to Cora, he hastened to Lily's couch.

"You shall go at once, darling," he said. "The moon is shining brilliantly, and the air is quite warm."

"I hated to break up your sweet confidences, but—I did it! Look what a fool mama is making of herself," and Lily looked disgusted. She seemed to have forgotten her request of the moment before.

Mrs. Wilde came up with a preoccupied air.

"You are going driving, Lily?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I am glad. I think you will sleep better for it. I shall take a little walk myself."

"With Colonel Haseby, of course," sneered Lily.

"You have said it."

Cora and Tresham had bidden Lily good-night and were going out when Mrs. Wilde came back.

"Join us in our stroll, Mrs. Allison," said she.

"Thank you, but Tresham wants me to help him get his tackle ready for to-morrow," Cora replied, as they departed.

Cora went to look for Tresham's fishing accouterments, and Tresham to the ball-room, where his fair enslaver was spinning about with a hateful cadet. Lucile saw him come in. She was gayer than ever, and flashed and sparkled as if she had been drinking wine. She was drink-

ing the elixir of love from this gloomy-looking young man's eyes, and everybody knows that it is far more intoxicating than champagne.

Truly, as Balzac writes, "Life is not worth living except to be perpetually in love."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A COUNTER-IRRITANT.

AFTER all, Tresham's courtship progressed famously, contrary to all the laws of love.

Likewise the Colonel's suit, for he had become most deadly earnest.

He found Mrs. Wilde just the woman he had been looking for.

Lily became more irritable as the days passed, poor soul! And Robert held counsel with Mrs. Wilde. "Mother, perhaps if we go elsewhere, Lily will be benefited more."

This did not suit the fair widow's plans, albeit she was not a heartless mother.

"I think Lily is doing very well. She does not get out enough. We can find no better health-giving air than this in North Carolina."

"I think myself that we can do no better, but——"

"Lily needs a counter-irritant," interposed Mrs. Wilde.

"She seems to have one."

"I know to what you allude. She takes no pains to conceal her absurd jealousy of Cora Allison, but that is nothing new. Has she not been jealous of every woman that you ever spoke to?"

He sighed, but said nothing.

A few moments later Robert saw the gallant Colonel hand her into a phaeton.

He whistled softly.

"I think I know what her counter-irritant will be," he said under his breath.

"Now, my dear lady, we have known each other personally nearly two months, and of each other's families all

our lives, and I think I have given you sufficient time to make up your mind," the Colonel said, flicking his whip at a persistent fly that seemed disposed to waken up the horse. But the Colonel did not wish to have the horse roused out of his placid gait—just yet.

"O, Colonel, only six weeks."

"Well, is not that nearly two months—time enough for a lady to make up her mind?"

"But think of our ages!"

He drew himself up stiffly.

"I am barely fifty-six, and you——"

And for once a woman told her age—after she had passed twenty-five.

"I am forty-six," she answered, a streak of red coming into her face where a blush would have mantled it some years ago.

"Older and wiser people than we have married, and been happy for it," he urged.

"That is true, and neither of us are without experience," she smiled.

He shook his shoulders impatiently.

"Then there is Lucile," she added.

"And it is partly because of Lucile that I urge haste upon you. She needs a mother's care just now worse than ever in her life."

"She is in a fairer way of getting a husband than a mother," she coolly informed him.

He jerked himself upright—he had been tickling that persistent fly again—turned around and looked at her in such a bewildered way, she laughed outright.

"W—what do you mean?" he gasped.

"Just what I say. Have you been blind that you have not seen that Tresham Willard adores the dirt beneath her little foot, while she tolerates his love-making?"

"My little Lucile to marry? She is only a baby."

"She is quite old enough to manage that great, handsome Hercules who lets her lead him around as if he were a good-natured bear and she a tricksy monkey."

He recovered his equilibrium and went back to himself. Do we ever forget ourselves for long?

"Then I shall be doubly desolate if she leaves me and you refuse me."

"Have I said I should refuse you?" she asked, looking as archly at him as Lucile could have done. I wonder what that age is when we find ourselves too old to ape the airs of youth?

"Not outright," he answered, "but when a woman stops to reason out a thing there is not much heart in it."

"How about a man?"

"We expect him to reason, but——"

"A woman must not?"

"She is most charming when she acts out her impulses," he bowed.

"Just so, and you men watch her when she is in a frolicsome mood as if she were a kitten at its gambols," she retorted.

He laughed amusedly. "I wonder why it makes a woman angry when any one tells her that she is not to be a reasoning being."

"Because no woman likes to be thought a fool. If she hasn't a thimbleful of brains, she expects to be given credit for at least a hundred times that much wisdom. Why were women created?"

"To be adored by men," he gallantly replied, for he was far too astute to tell her that she was talking "just like a woman."

"By a few," she replied. "I myself think woman a very useful institution, with a multitude of duties for which man is naturally incapacitated."

"Yes," he agreed, for he saw that he must let this particular woman "have her say out."

"One husband usually satisfies a wife, but men, forsooth, must be allowed to sip the sweets of life as freely as a butterfly sucks the honey from a thousand flowers, and so this gay creature has his wife, his sweetheart, and his lady friends by the score. But a woman, no matter how innocently, dare not so much as smile at another man, lest the texture of that fair garment, her character, be spotted by the mud thrown by indignant men and outraged women."

"But," he said, with a puzzled air, "I do not at all understand how we have wandered away from our subject."

"We have not wandered—just gone deeper into it," said she logically.

"Just one word," and he slipped his arm about her trim waist as he should have done long ago.

"Then it is——" she paused.

"What?" pressing the hand that he had found on the side furthest away, and looking anxiously into the face of this most provoking of women who could not forget that she was a woman.

"Yes," she breathed.

And then he kissed her.

Had they both been twenty years younger, we should not have smiled at the kiss, but when the world pictures wrinkled lips touching faded ones in a betrothal kiss, the world is ready to roar with laughter—laughter that is not concealed but broadly suggestive and openly hilarious.

So, why should we wonder at De Soto's search for the fountain that would smooth away the wrinkles of age, and leave the face as young as the heart?

"And now the children must be told."

Thus she spoke of Lily, a wife, and Lucile, a maiden, ready to be wooed as a wife.

The brave Colonel made a grimace.

"Let us first set the day. We are too old to waste time in idle dalliance or false sentiment. Since we both agree to take each other for better or for worse, let it be soon—before the season closes."

She drew back.

"O, mercy, no."

"Why not?"

"Well, because our season will close in a VERY few days. Lily is dissatisfied here."

"In three weeks, then, no matter where; here, there, just so it is on the earth."

"Well—I'll think about it."

And the woman who says that is lost!

When the drive ended, she went to Lily. Cora arose to go as she came in.

"Wait a moment, Mrs. Allison, I wish you to hear what I am going to say. Lily, in three weeks, I become Colonel Haseby's wife," she stated succinctly.

Lily stared at her mother and exclaimed:

"Of all the fools——"

Mrs. Wilde reddened.

Cora took her hand and kissed her affectionately.

"I'm so glad! He was one of my father's best friends. I hope you will be happy."

"So do I!" echoed Lily's voice. "I never was so astonished in my life! You, an old woman! O, mama, I never should have believed it of you!" and then she laughed hysterically.

Mrs. Wilde thanked Cora, then hurriedly left the room.

When Robert went to Lily's room, he found her still laughing.

"The most ridiculous thing, Robert. Mama is going to marry!"

"Yes," he said.

The counter-irritant had been applied.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER PAIR.

"I NEVER *will* call her mother!"

Lucile raved when her father told her of the step he contemplated.

He smiled grimly.

"And what if I were to say that I would never call *him* son?" he quizzed.

"Who? who? What do you mean?"

"Why, the man who is to marry you."

"Oh!" and she looked immensely relieved. "There will be some sense in *my* marrying," drawing herself up.

"Why not in mine?"

"Because you are too old!"

"And you too young!"

"I shall grow older, and I am *not* going to marry now."

"I am—in three weeks."

It was best to make a clean breast of it, he argued, mentally.

"What! what!" she shrieked, "a grown woman as I am!" and then the waterworks began in earnest.

"Since you are not grown——"

"But I *am* grown, boo-hooh! I am grown and graduated!" stamping both feet.

"You'll be 'finished' after your stepmother has the training of you for a while. Just now, you are a big, spoiled baby."

"And just now you said something about my getting married!"

"*You* said something about it, if I remember, but you did not tell me who the unlucky *boy* was."

She dashed vehemently out of the room, and he lay back and laughed heartily.

After having a good cry in her room, she donned her most becoming frock, perched a lace hat on her curls and sallied forth to a shady walk, where Tresham was waiting for her.

"Miss Lucile!"

"O, Mr. Willard, how you frightened me!"

"Not very much, I hope."

"Well—not *very*."

Tresham looked at her curiously.

"Anything wrong?" he said.

"I should think so!" fervently. "Why, my head is all in a muddle!"

"An unusual state," he delicately suggested.

She flashed him a look of scorn. Was he, too, ridiculing her grief?

"I think it a shameful outrage!" she burst forth.

"So do I," he agreed.

She peered sidewise at him. "O, no you don't; you are just like the rest of 'em. You'll think it a splendid match."

"Well, don't you?"

"Haven't I just said it was an outrage?"

"O, yes, of course," he meekly acquiesced. "Have put my foot in it," he muttered.

"What's that you said?"

"Nothing—struck my foot against a snag, you know."

"O!" suspiciously. "And they so old too. And if they were younger."

"I thought they were *too* young."

"And he over fifty? How can you say so? And she—O, women like her never get over thirty."

"You are not thirty." He answered more helplessly in the dark than ever.

"Who said I was, you great goose? Who *do* you suppose I am talking about?"

"Us, of course."

"Are there only two people in the world?" she asked, severely.

"There is only one to me," he said. "*You!*"

"I was talking of papa and his artful widow," she complained.

He brightened visibly.

"O, I see."

"Didn't you see before?" she asked.

"Why, no, for it's the strangest thing—when I am with you I never see anything else."

"I am not blind," she responded.

"Lucile, you must tell me to-day whether you love me or not," he said firmly.

She hid her face with her provoking parasol.

"What is it? Have I hurt you?"

She glanced adoringly at this splendid man. It was so delicious to feel that she could make him tremble with a look!

"N—no," she faltered, with pouting lips, "but papa says that I am too young."

"I know best. What does an old foggy like him know about love?"

"A very great deal, since he is to marry Mrs. Wilde in three weeks," she said in an aggrieved tone.

"Let us be married at the same time."

"How can you suggest such a thing! I wish to be engaged a long, *long* time. It's so interesting."

"Not for me," he fretted.

"Then we won't be engaged at all," and to make the threat more awful, she leaned toward him tenderly, placed her hand on his arm, pouted prettily, and—he kissed her!

"You must not do that—ever!" she said severely.

"Why? It is not man's nature to resist such sweet temptation."

"We must go home—or act sensibly," she said.

"To the latter I agree with all my heart."

"You are not, though," turning away from his ardent gaze, freeing herself from his encircling arms.

"All sensible men would agree that I had now reached the very acme of wisdom."

"But papa——"

"I don't care for an army of papas, I'd carry you off from under his very nose if he made any objection. But he won't—to our marriage," he added.

"How do you know?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SPEAK ME FAIR IN DEATH."

"ROBERT, I want to go home!"

"Yes, dear," and Robert Langsdale moved the pillow at his wife's head as she sat in an easy chair on the piazza.

"To Washington."

He looked pained.

"I had thought a winter in Florida or a trip to Madeira would be better. What do you say to that?"

She looked away from him.

"Would you be glad if I were to get well?"

"It is all that I live for now—to see you well and strong—and I believe you will soon."

She smiled sadly.

"Do you think so? Sit down, then, Robert, where I can look at you."

He obediently sought the ottoman at her feet.

"These white hairs so faintly visible—these lines in your face—lines of pain—these great hollows under your eyes—I, your wife, have put there."

She placed a hand over her eyes and he saw she was weeping.

"Don't, Lily, don't," he said in a choked voice.

"I have not been a good wife to you—I have been the unhappiest woman that ever walked the earth—but you will be happier when I am gone."

"No, no."

"Ah, yes, I see it all so clearly. Do you wonder why I have seemed so changed in the last few weeks? Robert, it is because I shall die with the Christian's hope. I have laughed at you when you would pray with me—when you wished to read the Book to me—and now these things console me. Do you know who has done this?"

"No."

"It is Cora, the best, purest, noblest of women. You love her." He seemed to shrink at her words, but she went on.

"Do not deny it, for the knowledge no longer hurts me. When I am gone, you will marry her—it is my wish."

"O, hush, hush, dearest! Only get well and I will show you how I love you," he exclaimed, tortured to the verge of madness; Lily's altered ways had so endeared her to him, he could not believe that she would leave him so soon—that Death's signet was stamped even now upon her cheek.

She was so gentle, patient, cheerful and uncomplaining.

"Yes, I have thought it all out—at night when I cannot sleep"—he clasped her more closely—"I look back and see the wrong I have done. I might have won your great love—I had many natural graces. I might have had my child now—I might have kept my health, had I been a true wife—had I given you a wife's submission. But I was never told of God—I grew up ignorant of the example and precepts of Christ. My mother was wealthy and fashionable—we attended fashionable churches when I chose, where only love of self was known. I never prayed in my life, except with my lips, until a few weeks ago. I never thought of, or believed in, a life for the soul—till now."

She pressed her hand to her side.

"You are fatiguing yourself."

"No, I must tell you all I would say to-day. To-morrow I may be too weak."

"No, no."

"Yes, it is true, love. I want you to remember that however greatly I have sinned against you, I gave *you* the best love of which I was capable."

"I shall not forget."

"And when you are happiest—"

"I shall never be happy again."

"O, yes, you will, very, very happy—and when you are happiest, you will give a thought to me, who would have made you happy—if I could."

"I know! I know!" cried the agonized husband.

"You will not forget me, poor boy. I'm not afraid of that," passing her hand again and again over his hair.

"Do not tell mama what I have been saying. She does not think me very ill—let her believe it still. Tomorrow she will be married. She will go away for two weeks, then she must come to us in Washington. Shall we not be there?"

"Dear, it will be so cold. Shall I not ask Dr. Merrill about it?"

"I have asked, and—he says it will do me no harm," she faltered.

A terrible chill settled about his heart.

"Lily!"

"You suffer!" Her face was full of compassion.

"And I am the cause! I have *never* given you any peace or joy!"

She lay back in her chair, sobbing convulsively.

"O, do not—do not," he entreated.

He knelt by her side, fondled her hands and stroked her face.

"The pang is passed," she said at last. "Cora tells me that God is good—that He doeth all things well. Can you tell me why you and I should suffer so?"

"To fit us for a higher life, and now I implore you to rest. Try to be happy—while we are together."

She shook her head.

"I have never known happiness, even when you asked me to be your wife. I knew that my love compelled you to do that, not yours for me. I have had all that wealth could give, yet I have been the most miserable of women. I made *you* my idol—I worshiped you as Cora worships her Christ, and now I must leave you! I have taught myself that I will meet you in another life, and now, my love, I can go in peace. Once, this life was all to me, and death a terrible thing, but Cora has been the angel that turned my bitterness to joy—the blackness of my grief at leaving you in a light that will guide me through the darkness of the grave into eternal joy and peace!"

She lay back exhausted.

"God give her peace!" prayed Robert.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WOMAN'S REASON.

THE day following Mrs. Wilde walked into their private parlor attired in a becoming costume of silver gray.

The clergyman, Robert and Lily awaited her.

Cora came with the bride-elect, and immediately afterwards, through the window, at a signal from Robert, Tresham and Lucile entered.

Colonel Haseby met his bride at the door, and placing her hand, which trembled a little, on his arm, led her before the clergyman. The ceremony was very private, none of the hotel guests knew about it till the pair were gone.

"I suppose, dear Mrs. Langsdale, I must submit with as good grace as possible to our new relations," Lucile laughed.

"Ah, dear, could you not call me sister? I have never had a sister, you know."

"Nor I," and Lucile sat down on the cushion at Lily's feet and submitted to her caressing hand.

"I think we will get on famously, then," said Lily, with a gentle smile.

Lucile's head fell on Lily's knee, and she wept with girlish abandon.

"I want you to spend the winter in Washington with me," she said.

"Is Washington very gay?" cried Lucile, wiping away the last stray tear, and laughing as readily as she had cried.

"Quite so, and if we can persuade Miss Cora to come to us for the winter, you will have a superior chaperone," Lily continued.

"Will you, Mrs. Allison?" Lucile turned a glowing, eager face in her direction.

Cora hesitated a moment.

"I will consult Tresham, and if he thinks we can do it—well, we will see, but really I do not think we ought to go," she finally answered.

"Why?" said Lily.

"Washington in the winter would not be pleasant for me," she replied, stooping to arrange Lily's footstool.

A change came over Lily's face.

"Lucile, please ask Robert to go away from the window to talk—or, stay, suppose you tell him that you want to go to Glenwood Falls once more."

Blushing consciously, Lucile went to do her bidding.

"Now, Cora, I am ready to hear your *real* reason for not wishing to go to Washington this winter," said Lily, putting her hand on her friend's shoulder.

"I have given it," Cora answered steadily.

Lily took the face upturned to hers in her two hands and gazed searchingly into the pathetic eyes.

"Your eyes do not lie, but, Cora, you know that I cannot hope to live long—you know I adore my husband, but you also know you are so dear to me, I cannot bear to be separated from you—when——" but her voice choked and she sobbed violently. Cora was alarmed.

"You know who can best comfort you, and if you need my poor help, I will go."

"It will not be for long," Lily murmured.

"I do so wish you would try Florida for the winter," urged Cora, stroking Lily's transparent hand.

"No, no, it would do no good—nothing will cure me, and I am so tired! I want to die *at home*. O, my God! and I am still so young!" she burst out.

Cora called Robert, then leaving the two alone, she crept up to her own room.

"O, I can't bear it! The trial she would put upon me is too much. Lord, help thy servant," and falling prone upon the floor, she prayed till peace calmed her troubled soul.

It was now the first of October, and against the en-

treaties of her friends, Lily insisted on going to Washington.

"I want to go home! I want to go home!" was her perpetual cry.

Poor soul! Would she find peace there?

CHAPTER XXXV.

"SHE FALLETH ASLEEP."

A FEW days after Mrs. Wilde's marriage found Lily, Robert and Lucile in Washington.

Lily at once asked Robert to drive to Irene's grave.

She was tenderly assisted into the low carriage, and lay back upon the dark cushions, looking up at the soft sky and purple haze which tinged the royal October day, with melancholy.

"My life was like a summer rose," she said. "Dear, how long have we been married?"

Robert bent his head. How his heart ached and throbbed as he looked at her so surely fading from his sight! He loved her now—why could he not keep her? Yet he knew that his love for Lily was as a brother's, and not to be compared to the deep, passionate love he had once borne Cora Allison.

"You do not answer."

He started.

"It is almost three years, dear love."

"And I have known you but four! My husband, I am glad that I have known you. I am glad that I have been your wife, if only for a little while."

She sighed.

He looked straight ahead as the ponies trotted easily along, for there was moisture in his eyes, and he feared the sight would add to the sorrow of this dying woman—she who had been so violent, so headstrong, so passionate, but who had now become the gentlest and most patient of her sex.

"You do not regret that you married me—now?" she said wistfully.

"No, no, a thousand times no, my dear one," and he drew her gently to his heart.

They stood by the monument beside a tiny grave. She looked at it silently a moment, then passed a finger, white as the marble itself, over the smooth side.

"It is here you will write 'Lily, my wife. He giveth his beloved sleep.'"

The strong man at her side groaned.

"My poor Robert! I make you suffer!" and he took her in his arms and carried her to the carriage without speaking.

Soon afterwards Cora and Tresham came to Washington.

Lucile was not introduced into society that winter, but she had a great deal of pleasure.

Colonel Haseby and his wife returned from their wedding trip and took up their abode with the Langsdales, whose home was the old Wilde mansion where Lily was born, where she had lived, and where she wished to die.

Mrs. Haseby was shocked at the evident weakness of her daughter.

On the first day of the New Year she died in the arms of the man she had loved so well.

They wrapped her in the softest lace and placed her in the room where she had stood one year before, beautiful, proud, wilful, defiant, throbbing with health, and totally unmindful of her child who lay sick unto death. How could he know that it was because she realized that Robert still gave to another woman the divine love that should have been hers?

Immediately after the last rites, Cora and Tresham went South.

Robert remained a short while with Colonel and Mrs. Haseby; then, having arranged his affairs for an indefinite absence, he went away.

"Where to?" asked Mrs. Haseby, with grief in her voice.

"I do not know, mother," he answered.

"God go with you."

CHAPTER XXXVI

A VALENTINE.

"PAPA, I'm eighteen now, and Tresham is an old man. He is twenty-eight at least."

It is a year after Lily's death, and the Haseby family are in the South in the old ancestral home. It is winter, but to-day the south wind blows softly. Lucile has hung a hammock in a sunny nook, where she idly swings.

"You are a pert young woman. Why don't you let this bashful Hercules do his own pleading?"

But as the sunny crows' feet deepened about his eyes and he rustled his paper noisily to hide a suspicious "hem," Lucile was quick enough to read these signs favorably.

"He is not awkward nor bashful—and I've heard fifty women declare that he has the most elegant manner and graceful address of any man of their acquaintance."

"They say that *to* your face."

"And behind my back. *All* the girls are dying of jealousy because the adorable man loves me."

"How do you know he loves you?"

"Because he has told me so," she said triumphantly, and bounding out of the hammock, she rushed past him, with her ribbons wildly streaming in the breeze.

That day Tresham called and made his manly appeals.

"Perhaps I am too old for her, but I have never loved any other woman, and have really had no time to think of marriage. As you must know, the war beggared us, and I grew up only a plowboy."

"It is just because of all that that I feel so secure in giving my daughter's happiness into your keeping," the Colonel exclaimed heartily, almost wringing Tresham's hand off in the excess of his approbation.

"God bless you, my boy! I'm just a mite afraid that my girl, being unbridled all her life, may give you a little trouble in the breaking in."

"There will never be any need of a 'breaking in' or bridling," Tresham laughed.

"Eh! Eh! You are one of those shortsighted young men who believe it possible to mould young wives to his way of thinking."

"By no means, sir, but if I make her a good husband, she'll be obliged to be a good wife."

"A rule that does not always bring correct results. However, the risk is yours."

"Which I am willing to take," Tresham assured him.

Lucile's trousseau was made ready in a month, and she became the proverbial blushing bride of Tresham Willard on that day, of all days, the fourteenth of February.

"My valentine!" he called her.

Unlike most brides, she looked very beautiful in her white silk and lace gown.

Robert was still traveling. He repudiated the fortune Lily had left him, and took stern measures to settle it on her mother before he started on his travels.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"HOW WILL SHE ANSWER?"

"ONLY eighteen months! Will she think it too soon? O, if she but knew the awful trial the past year has been to me! She is a woman, and women are always pitiful, whether they understand the depth of a sorrow or not. Thank God that they are so!"

Thus mused Robert Langsdale as he sat in a hotel in Texas. He would leave this very afternoon for Alabama to lay at Cora Willard's feet the burden of his great love and unutterable longing for her; the burden which he had borne silently for more than six years.

He is on the train, and the fast turning wheels bear him nearer that loved one who is to answer the question he asked in a letter of a few days before, wherein he had told her of his years of devotion, his misunderstanding and suffering.

Lucile and Tresham were driving about the plantation, and Cora sat in the same room where, nearly fourteen years before, she had promised Guy Allison to be his wife.

There was a ring at the front door. Not the old knocker that had announced Guy Allison, but a modern electric bell awakened her from her reverie. The door fell back on its hinges, the portière was thrust aside, and Robert entered.

Cora trembled and turned white.

He came toward her and took her hands in his.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"SHUT UP IN MEASURELESS CONTENT."

"CORAL"

They stood, reading the soul in the depths of each other's eyes.

He would have drawn her to him.

"No!" How husky her voice was!

"No—not yet!"

He had the appearance of a man with fever. But Robert Langsdale was master of himself.

"Cora, I have dreamed of this time! Now, what is your answer to be?"

He held her hand firmly. Her lips quivered as she gazed at him with those sad eyes, and answered:

"My friend, I do not know."

"Why do you not know?"

She looked away from him, and her voice sounded dreary as she answered:

"I have drank deeply of the wine of life—ah, I have drained the cup to its dregs—and now it seems all bitterness. Robert, I am only thirty-one, but I bear the weight of a hundred years. Once I loved—as few men are loved—you went away—you went away—you spoke no word to give me hope—you married——"

She was weeping.

He took her in his arms—he pressed her to his breast.

"Cora, it is true I have been a husband, but I loved only you. I heard, and believed, that your husband was living—but that he was confined in an insane asylum, and that his friends wished the world to think him dead. Dared I love another man's wife? Honor demanded that I should no longer meet you, and so, coward that I was, I fled. Through all these years your image has been with

me—in my dreams I could clasp you in my arms as I do now—in my dreams I drank kisses from your lips, your cheeks, your brow, your hair—as I do now!”

And he kissed her passionately.

“I have come to you now—God knows how I longed to do so the past awful year. I have missed Lily—but I wanted you! Dear, do not tell me that you cannot love me—do not tell me that you will not be my wife!”

Slowly her hands clasped about his neck.

“My husband!” she whispered.

Thus her frozen heart was melted, and the warm beams from this sun of love flooded her heart and guided her out of the Valley of Darkness where she had dwelt so long.

THE END,



